

Message

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From: Gov. Deal's Communications Office <press@georgia.gov>
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To: Gov. Deal's Communications Office <press@georgia.gov>
Subject: News Clips 9/26

Daily News Clips
Gov. Nathan Deal
Wednesday, September 26

Good morning!

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ND

1. Savannah Morning News

Training in high-demand careers, grants available

By Bill Astary

Tuesday, September 25

Georgia employers spoke and the state listened.

In response to a critical need for skilled workers in several key industries, Gov. Nathan Deal launched the High Demand Career Initiative in 2014. Initially, the state worked with key employers in strategic industries around Georgia to identify current and future workforce needs.

Now that these needs have been identified, the Universities and Technical College Systems of Georgia, including Georgia Tech's Savannah Campus, have developed curricula to address workforce shortages and provide training in high-demand and well-paid careers.

The initiative seeks to create public and private partnerships that will develop a locally trained, reliable workforce that can sustain the state's current thriving industries and attract new companies.

One of the findings of the initiative was an acute need for web developers, software developers, and computer programmers. Web development jobs are projected to grow 20 percent by 2022, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. These positions are vital — not just in the information technology sector, but a wide variety of industries to include agriculture and food, aerospace, automotive, defense and logistics and transportation.

Logistics is another key industry for Georgia, especially in Savannah, home to the country's fourth-largest container port. The industry needs skilled workers to warehouse the goods shipped to the port and transport them to their destination. The American Trucking Association predicts that the industry will need to hire 96,000 drivers a year to keep pace with demand. The Bureau of Labor and Statistics recently found that nearly one-quarter of transportation and warehouse employees are reaching retirement age, leaving a wide gap for a new generation to take over.

The initiative also identified Georgia's multi-billion-dollar manufacturing industry as a key business partner in need of skilled labor. The manufacturing industry, which accounts for 11 percent of the state's economy, recently has transformed from a traditional conveyor belt operation using unskilled labor to an advanced manufacturing system in need of skilled employees to operate the advanced machinery and monitor automated systems.

The technical college system also offers targeted training to support high-demand careers in areas such as commercial truck driving, early childhood care and education, health science, industrial maintenance, movie production set design, practical nursing, precision manufacturing, and welding/joining technology.

Employers who need to update their employees' skills in these key industries may be eligible for cost reimbursement. The Georgia Department of Economic Development facilitates reimbursement through WorkSource Georgia's Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) program. The funding is based on a sliding scale depending on the employee size of the company. Companies with 50 or fewer employees receive 90 percent back; those with 50 to 100 employees receive 75 percent, and companies with 100 or more employees get a reimbursement of 50 percent.

Providing training for these in-demand positions benefits Georgians, Georgia companies and the state.

Georgians can qualify for well-paid positions that keep them close to home and family. Georgia companies avoid paying high relocation costs for out-of-state employees and have a greater chance of retaining employees because they are already home. And the state benefits from the reputation of being a great place to do business.

Georgia's technical colleges are providing programs that will not only encourage Georgia's current business partners to stay here, but motivate new businesses to move here.

William J. Astarj, an industry veteran with 25 years of senior management and executive level experience, is director of industry strategic partnerships at Georgia Tech-Savannah.

2. AJC

Nuclear disagreements aired publicly by Georgia project owners

By Matt Kempner and Anastacia Ondieki

Tuesday, September 25

A battle burst into the public Tuesday between the biggest partners in Georgia's controversial Plant Vogtle nuclear expansion, as pressure grew to save the nation's only commercial nuclear project still under construction.

The dominant issue: growing certainty that potentially billions more in cost overruns are possible. Those overruns would affect customers of nearly every utility in Georgia, most of which are slated to get energy from the project.

As of late Tuesday evening, Vogtle's owners hadn't finalized how to bridge their differences and keep the multi-billion-dollar nuclear project alive. Negotiations were believed to be continuing.

A day earlier, the board of Oglethorpe Power — the project's second biggest owner — demanded that a cost cap be put on the project. It also insisted that Georgia Power's parent company, Southern Company, eventually take on the additional financial risk if it continues to be wrong about cost projections on the work it manages.

It was the first public call by a Vogtle owner to enact limits on project costs. Georgia Power, the lead owner on the project, quickly blasted that proposal.

In a press release the state's largest utility accused Oglethorpe of attempting "to avoid obligations that it undertook when it became an owner of the project."

Oglethorpe serves membership-based electric utilities in metro Atlanta and elsewhere in the state. Many serve rural areas.

If Oglethorpe didn't vote to continue under Vogtle's current ownership structure, Georgia Power wrote that "the project will be canceled to the detriment of the citizens of Georgia."

"Instead of taking a long-term view, Oglethorpe Power is using the vote to try to burden others with its obligations and extract unreasonable concessions," Georgia Power stated in its release.

It suggested Oglethorpe "abdicated its responsibilities to its customers" by relying on budget projections by Georgia Power's sister company Southern Nuclear, which is leading construction.

Oglethorpe swiped back.

In a press release it accused Georgia Power of launching "a misinformation campaign" and stated "we want to reaffirm that we hope Plant Vogtle will become a reality and that the hardworking people on the project will not lose their jobs. However, we cannot abdicate our duty to our members."

After nine years of construction, the project south of Augusta is billions of dollars over budget and years behind schedule. It is now slated to go online in late 2022.

'We have concerns'

Gary Miller, the chief executive of Greystone Power Corporation, which serves portions of Fulton, Cobb, Douglas and other counties, voiced concerns about the impact of Vogtle's ballooning pricetag on his customers and those of other Oglethorpe members.

"We never signed up for a project where we would just be a blank checkbook for Southern Company or anybody else in this project," Miller said. "We never said, 'Build it no matter what the cost.'"

The Southern figures showed "every single category of budget was over budget" under the the company, Miller said. "We have concerns about their cost estimates and managing the project efficiently."

Recently, Georgia Power announced another \$2.3 billion in cost overruns, just eight months after its last announcement of increased costs. That automatically triggered a requirement that co-owners on the Vogtle project again vote on whether to continue the work.

Three of the project's four owners — Georgia Power, Dalton Utilities and the Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia, which represent city utilities around the state — voted to continue the expansion, apparently without conditions.

At least two of them are partially buffered from the pain of cost increases.

Southern Company is publicly traded and can pass along some of the costs to shareholders. Georgia Power, a state-regulated monopoly, is generally allowed to collect more profits the more it spends on construction. And MEAG has sold off much of its project energy rights — as well as cost responsibilities

— to utilities in Alabama and Florida. (One of them, JEA in Jacksonville, Fla., is suing to extricate itself from the deal.)

Oglethorpe, though, faces more pressure.

Apparently anticipating that additional cost increases are likely, the cost cap Oglethorpe's board proposed would be \$800 million higher than Georgia Power's latest estimates of what it will take to complete the project.

"Oglethorpe deserves credit for taking a stand to protect its customers and the economic future of Georgia's rural communities," Kurt Ebersbach of the Southern Environmental Law Center said in an emailed statement. "Georgia Power's opposition to a cap says a lot about how it views its own customers and its ability to successfully manage the project. Georgians shouldn't stand behind this project if Georgia Power can't stand behind its current budget, even with this latest \$2.3 billion spike."

But pressure from politicians grew Tuesday.

Gov. Nathan Deal, in a tweet, called for Oglethorpe "to reconsider its decision before walking away from from 7,000 GA jobs," a reference to temporary construction jobs on the site.

Sen. Johnny Isakson issued a statement encouraging "all parties to come together and find a way forward on an agreement to complete this critical project."

Jay Powell, a state representative who chairs the house Ways & Means committee, said it appeared that Georgia Power was contacting state legislators to get them to help change the views of Oglethorpe and EMC leaders.

Powell was one of about 20 state legislators who recently wrote a letter pushing for a cap on how much customers pay for increasing costs at Vogtle.

Vogtle costs have been adjusted five times since the project got certified in 2009.

3. Wall Street Journal

Future of Last U.S. Nuclear Plant Remains Uncertain Amid Talks

By Russell Gold

Tuesday, September 25

The owners of the only remaining nuclear-power plant being built in the U.S. extended a vote on whether to continue construction until Tuesday, after one sought to impose conditions on footing its escalating costs.

The three major partners, Southern Co. SO -2.51%, Oglethorpe Power Corp. and the Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia, had faced a deadline of Monday to each vote to proceed with work to expand the Alvin W. Vogtle Electric Generating Plant.

The vote was triggered by a recent disclosure by Southern, the lead partner, that the costs of the project had risen by another \$2.2 billion. That raised the total tab to upward of \$27 billion, more than twice the original estimate. The project is also taking years longer than originally expected.

This last-minute negotiation suggested that continuing work on the half-built nuclear-power plant, while possible, remained uncertain.

Oglethorpe, a not-for-profit that purchases power on behalf of its public power members, said Monday evening that it voted to continue construction if Southern could provide a cost cap or other fiscal protection against additional cost overruns. "Southern Company should be willing to bear further risk of...missed budgets, not our members," Oglethorpe Chief Executive Mike Smith said.

Oglethorpe said it would agree to a recent \$2.2 billion increase in the projected cost and another \$800 million to increase the contingency fund. But it said additional costs should be shouldered by Southern and its shareholders.

Southern expressed disappointment with Oglethorpe's attempt to extract concessions and hoped it would agree to move forward. "Oglethorpe Power is using the vote to try to burden others with its obligations and extract unreasonable concessions," the company said.

While Southern supports going ahead with Vogtle, it is unclear if the Atlanta-based utility would agree to the conditions sought by Oglethorpe or seek a different deal.

On Monday afternoon, the board of directors of the Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia, known as MEAG, voted unanimously to proceed without conditions. It is unclear if any negotiated deal would apply to it as well as Oglethorpe.

Southern's Georgia Power unit owns 45.7% of the plant, while Oglethorpe owns 30% and MEAG, 22.7%. Dalton Utilities owns the remaining 1.6%, but it doesn't have a large enough stake to derail the project.

The partners have come under criticism from power customers and others who say the nuclear expansion has become a boondoggle that will saddle them with higher utility rates for years. Earlier this month, JEA, a Jacksonville, Fla., utility that agreed to purchase electricity from Vogtle, filed a lawsuit and took out advertisements urging that the project be abandoned. A spokesman for JEA said it was working with Carlyle Group LP to finance a new power deal for Oglethorpe and MEAG, allowing them to back away from the nuclear-power plant.

The owners also have come under increasing pressure from politicians who favor completion. Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal offered his full support for the Vogtle expansion, citing the more than 6,000 jobs created. The power plant is located in Waynesboro, Ga. The U.S. Department of Energy, which had provided generous federal loan guarantees to help support the project, said it would seek accelerated repayment if the project were abandoned.

Avoiding a decision to abandon work, for now, keeps alive the only nuclear plant under construction, or even serious consideration, in the U.S.

Last year, work stopped on the only other nuclear-power plant under construction in the country, the V.C. Summer Nuclear Generating Station in South Carolina, after it, too, encountered billions in cost overruns and years of delays. The decision to pull the plug on that plant has in turn triggered a political debate about who should pay for its billions in expenses.

The domestic nuclear industry has struggled to remain competitive. Several older nuclear plants, built in the 1960s and 1970s, have closed in recent years, unable to compete with newer plants that burn low-cost natural gas. Others have sought new subsidies to continue operations.

If the partners had abandoned Vogtle, the decision would have marked an end to a campaign to turn around the industry. Vogtle is the last remnant of what was supposed to be a new wave of nuclear plants in the U.S. using modular reactors by Westinghouse Electric Co. that were billed as being cheaper and easier to build than prior models.

But it has faced many setbacks since work began a decade ago. Nuclear regulators required design changes after the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima nuclear-power plant in Japan. Rising costs of the plant plunged Westinghouse, the designer and former construction contractor of Vogtle, into bankruptcy. The project has struggled to hire and retain qualified construction workers. There have also been problems with quality control in manufactured parts for the plant.

4. Marietta Daily Journal
Countdown ticking on Vogtle
By Ross Williams
Tuesday, September 25

The fate of the two planned towers at Plant Vogtle depends on a high-stakes game of chicken between three of the project's owners that could last until the end of the month.

The towers represent the only nuclear power units being built in the U.S.

On one side are two of the three largest stakeholders, Georgia Power, which owns 45.7 percent, and the Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia, which owns 22.7 percent. They both voted to continue work on the \$27 billion towers, which were originally projected to cost \$9.5 billion and set to be completed in 2016. The current estimated time of completion is 2022.

On the other side is another partial owner, Oglethorpe Power, which owns 30 percent. In a Monday evening vote, Oglethorpe only agreed to move forward with the project on the condition that the latest \$2.3 billion budget increase be the last one.

That increase triggered a clause in the ownership agreement leading to the vote. Under that clause, 90 percent of the owners must vote yes for work to continue. That means if any of the three major stakeholders vote no, the new towers are dead in the water.

Georgia Power gave Oglethorpe a deadline of 5 p.m. to vote yes or no. That deadline was then extended to 7 p.m., then again to 11:30 p.m., which is after the MDJ goes to press.

Marietta Mayor Steve Tumlin, who also represents the city on the MEAG board of directors, said utilities can extend the deadline a total of seven days, starting from Monday. If neither side blinks, it would be the same result as a no vote from Oglethorpe and spell doom for the new towers.

Tumlin said Georgia Power has helped absorb the additional costs for MEAG using other means, especially by making production tax credits available at a higher-than-market rate. Those are tax credits granted per kilowatt-hour for certain energy sources, including nuclear. They can only be granted to a taxpaying entity like Georgia Power.

Tumlin said he remains hopeful that the parties will find a similar solution that will satisfy Oglethorpe.

In a press release after Monday's vote, Oglethorpe president and CEO Mike Smith said the utility provider believes nuclear power can be "a reliable source of clean, carbon-free electric generation that could benefit the region for 60 to 80 years," but he said Oglethorpe's ratepayers, especially those in rural areas, cannot stomach the continual bill increases for a project that may not benefit them for years to come.

"We are hopeful that the Southern Company will agree with a proposal to protect our rural energy consumers in Georgia who should not be responsible for excessive future increases in the costs of this project," he said. "The Southern Company directly owns and controls Southern Nuclear Corporation (SNC), which has control of the site and project oversight of Vogtle 3 and 4. As SNC's owner, Southern

Company should be willing to bear further risk of SNC's missed budgets, not our members.

"Capping our costs, and by extension the costs borne by our EMC members, is a reasonable request and a prudent business decision that would allow the project to move forward," Smith added.

The other owners have taken their battle to the internet in a series of dueling press releases.

"Oglethorpe Power has asked for an extension and demanded concessions to avoid obligations that it undertook when it became an owner of the project," Georgia Power said in a statement.

MEAG Power President and CEO Jim Fuller chimed in in the same statement.

"The MEAG Power Board voted unanimously to support completion of the project, taking into account the environmental and economic benefits of the project to the state," he said. "We are disappointed that Oglethorpe Power has not yet joined us in agreeing to complete the units for the future of Georgia."

Gov. Nathan Deal also put pressure on Oglethorpe via a series of tweets.

"I also call upon Oglethorpe Power Company to reconsider its decision before walking away from ... 7,000 GA jobs," Deal tweeted. "Our low carbon-free electric rates allow us to remain competitive in this economic development environment... The co-owners should honor their commitments and complete this project."

In a press release responding to what it called "a misinformation campaign," Oglethorpe said it hopes Vogtle will move forward and wants to protect its jobs, but that it must also look out for its ratepayers.

They said a vote to reconsider would be triggered by a cost increase greater than \$1 billion, and the latest projected increase was more than twice that, and with four years left in the construction schedule.

"We are not asking for Georgia Power or Southern Company to 'pay our share,'" the release said. "Once the lead partner triggered the opportunity to vote, we exercised our right to bring issues to the forefront that have been expressed privately over the past year and that is, rural Georgians cannot withstand ever-escalating rates and it must be stopped. We have asked that Southern Company, as a for-profit entity with the most to gain from Plant Vogtle, to take the excess costs to their investors whose very presence aligns with risk taking."

5. WSB

Your monthly electric bill could be going up

By Richard Elliot

Tuesday, September 25

Both sides in a dispute over the future of a multibillion-dollar nuclear power plant now have until 11:30 p.m. Tuesday to come to an agreement, or construction could come to a halt.

Either way, it could cost you even more for electricity.

Georgia's governor wanted the project to move forward.

State lawmakers wanted it to move forward too, but not without some concessions from Georgia Power.

Nuclear power Plant Vogtle's Units Three and Four are among the biggest construction projects in Georgia history, a project that is already years behind schedule and billions of dollars over budget.

Just last month, Georgia Power announced another \$2 billion cost overrun, triggering a vote from the plant's co-owners.

Three co-owners voted to keep the project moving forward. Oglethorpe Power said, maybe.

Channel 2's Richard Elliot emailed both sides to see if they'd go on camera. He received competing news releases instead.

Facing such a cost overrun, Oglethorpe Power said it could vote to continue the project, but only if it got certain concessions from Georgia Power, including a cost cap.

Georgia Power called that request an "unreasonable concession."

Georgia politicians weighed in on the debate as well. Gov. Nathan Deal supports the project and the jobs it would create.

In a text message Elliot received from his office Tuesday morning, Deal said, "I also call upon Oglethorpe Power Company to reconsider its decision before walking away from seven thousand jobs."

Georgia Sen. Johnny Isakson joined Deal and said, "I encourage all parties to come together and find a way forward on an agreement to complete this critical project."

But other state lawmakers aren't so keen on the cost overruns.

Channel 2 Action News obtained a letter to Vogtle's owners signed by several legislators expressing their concerns about cost overruns and the impact they could have on EMC's around Georgia.

They also asked for a cost cap and for Georgia Power to shoulder more of the financial burden.

6. AJC

Georgia gov candidates wary of electrifying Vogtle debate

By Greg Bluestein

Wednesday, September 26

The top candidates for Georgia governor have refused to wade deeply into the crackling debate over the fate of the only U.S. nuclear power plant under construction, a troubled \$28 billion project.

Democrat Stacey Abrams encouraged the bickering co-owners to "come to the table and work together to find a solution that supports the workers and the future of energy in Georgia."

And Republican Brian Kemp pointed to the "huge economic development" potential for the project, which supporters have said is essential for the state's growth.

"There's a lot riding on that. And I'm glad all the stakeholders are talking and continuing to negotiate," said Kemp. "I'm not going to get in the middle of their negotiations – that's something they need to do."

Those talks are closely watched by the U.S. nuclear industry, which counts Vogtle as the last commercial nuclear plant under construction after Scana Corp. was forced to abandon a similar project in South

Carolina due to cost overruns.

Atlanta-based Southern Co. has pledged to go forward, and two minority partners – Dalton Utilities and the Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia – have also agreed to plunge ahead on the project.

A fourth investor, Oglethorpe Power Corp., has insisted on a cap to control costs as the budget has doubled from an initial estimate of \$14 billion.

It's prickly territory for the two candidates, who are both under pressure from Southern Co. to support it.

Gov. Nathan Deal and a host of other state leaders have lobbied to keep it alive. So has the U.S. Department of Energy, which warned it could demand repayment of about \$5.6 billion in federal loans if the project is abandoned.

And Democrats are mindful of crossing the 7,000 or so employees on what could be the largest union work site in Georgia.

7. WABE

Deal's Criminal Justice Reform Legacy And The Ga. Governor's Race

By Emma Hurt

Tuesday, September 25

On the campaign trail, both major party candidates for Georgia governor have praised Republican Gov. Nathan Deal's criminal justice reforms. But, while Democrat Stacey Abrams wants to continue and expand on his policies, Republican Brian Kemp is focused on other issues.

Deal's criminal justice policies have prioritized keeping nonviolent offenders out of prison and lowering the rate of repeat offenders, and they've been a hallmark of his administration.

"Nathan Deal has done more for criminal justice reform than any governor in my recent memory," said Abrams at a town hall in Dalton last month. "Georgia used to have the fourth-highest incarceration rate in the nation. We're now down to No. 9."

She said Georgia now needs to build on Deal's work and go further. Accountability courts, for example, aim to keep people with mental illnesses and addictions out of prison. Their expansion has been one of his major criminal justice accomplishments, and Abrams wants to add even more.

She also has said she wants to expand "ban the box" initiatives, which remove the question about a criminal record from employment applications. Deal signed such an executive order in 2015 regarding all state employment applications.

How does Kemp plan to continue Deal's legacy? He has said he wants to build off of what Deal and his predecessor Sonny Purdue have done, economically and with criminal justice reform.

"To me the next step is public safety reform, kind of building off the good things he and the Legislature has done in a bipartisan way on criminal justice reform and now go after the problems that are out there that I've been hearing about on the ground. And that is exactly what I'm going to do," he said at a public safety press conference last week. "We have got bipartisan support."

To Kemp, big problems and his public safety platform are gangs and "criminal illegal immigrants." "My goal as governor is to run [gangs] out of our state, to another state, and let them deal with them," he

said.

"When I look at Secretary Kemp's website, his discussion of issues related to policing and crime focuses on undocumented immigrants and it focuses on gangs," said Andra Gillespie, political science professor at Emory University. "And so in my estimation, that is a crime platform, that's not a criminal justice platform."

That contrasts with Abrams, she said, who appears to consider criminal justice issues a "core part of her campaign."

"[Abrams] is trying to make the appeal to centrist voters who perhaps are sensitive to or sympathetic to Gov. Deal's efforts to say that she's actually more akin to Gov. Deal than say Brian Kemp is," she said. "And to the extent that she's actually talking about those issues on her website, which she is, you could see some of the similarities."

There are differences, too, Gillespie qualified. Abrams is pushing some issues Deal has opposed, like decriminalizing possession of small amounts of marijuana and ending cash bail. Deal has been in favor of giving localities the ability to do so.

Deal has said just addressing gangs isn't enough.

"I know a lot of discussion is going on now about gang activity. That is certainly one that we should be concerned about. But we can't ignore the fact that if a young woman or a young man does not graduate from high school, the future of their success in life is greatly, greatly diminished," he said at an Atlanta Press Club event last week.

However, Gillespie points out, Kemp's position is probably not an accident, given that he didn't run as the "heir apparent" in the primary.

"I think he meant to distinguish himself from Gov. Deal when he ran for office," she said.

Abrams does not mention gangs in her criminal justice platform.

8. AJC

The Jolt: Evidence of a revolt among older, women voters in metro Atlanta

By Jim Galloway, Greg Bluestein and Tamar Hallerman

Tuesday, September 25

The time has come to take you into the wild realm of raw, unweighted polling data – the kind that on-the-fly campaigns use to make final-approach decisions.

Chris Huttman is a numbers cruncher who has been polling state House and Senate districts where Democrats hope to make a mark on Nov. 6. Most of them are in metro Atlanta, where both Hillary Clinton and Mitt Romney did well in presidential runs -- areas in which Democrats make up between 45 and 55 percent of the vote.

Huttman, a Democrat, thinks he's come across evidence of a coming revolt among older, female voters.

And his numbers were generated before whatever Rubicon is offered up Thursday in a U.S. Senate hearing that will feature U.S. Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh and the woman accusing him of assaulting her sexually when they were both in high school.

Huttman shot us some interesting breakdowns of a generic ballot question – Would you vote for a Republican or a Democrat? -- by age and gender, 2016 versus 2018. First, a baseline among all respondents over 50:

-- 2016: 38 percent Democrat, 57 percent Republican (Total: 1,716);

-- 2018: 43 percent Democrat, 51 percent Republican (Total: 2,488);

That's a Democratic gain of 5 points in two years, compared to a 6 percent loss for Republicans – or an 11-point shift in favor of Democrats. (The MOE is in the +/-2 percent neighborhood here.)

Now let's break it down. The shift was smallest among men ages 65 and older:

-- 2016: 32 percent Democrat, 63 percent Republican;

-- 2018: 34 percent Democrat, 60 percent Republican;

That's only a five-point gain for Democrats, well within the margin of error. (MOE for subgroups is +/-4-6)

The next smallest swing was among men between the ages of 50 and 64:

-- 2016: 40 percent Democrat; 53 percent Republican;

-- 2018: 41percent Democrat; 48 percent Republican;

That's a six-point gain for Democrats, again within the likely margin of error.

It gets interesting when we shift genders: Among women over the age of 65:

-- 2016: 37 percent Democrat, 58 percent Republican;

-- 2018: 44 percent Democrat, 52 percent Republican;

That's a 13-point Democratic swing, just a bit higher than the largest baseline group.

Finally, we come to women between the ages of 50 and 64:

-- 2016: 44 percent Democratic, 51 Republican;

-- 2018: 54 percent Democratic; 40 percent Republican;

That's a 21-point shift within this group, far above the 11 percent swing among all older voters. Given that women between the ages of 50 and 64 make up about 18 percent of the voting pool in Georgia, Huttman told us, this is an age group that will hold more than a few political futures in their hands.

The above stats are nearly certain to have an impact in the Sixth District congressional race, never mind the state House and Senate district races contained within it.

Last Friday, U.S. Rep. Karen Handel, R-Roswell, spoke to the Cobb County Republican Women's Club – before Christine Blasey Ford agreed to testify before a U.S. Senate committee on Thursday.

A 90-second audio clip of Handel's appearance has surfaced, perhaps made by a Democratic tracker. It records an exchange between the Republican incumbent and an unidentified member of the audience, on the topic of U.S. Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh. It's one of those rare instances in which the question posed was every bit as important as the answer, especially given the friendly GOP turf. From the audience:

"About this thing with Kavanaugh. I'm in my 70s now. [When I was] 18 years old, I was attacked just like she was. And thank God I got out of it without being raped. But I don't forget one second of what he did to me. And how does she forget? Ask her that. Because it's like when Kennedy was assassinated or when the towers fell. We don't forget. You don't forget when you're almost raped. So I'm believing her."

The woman received loud applause. This was Handel's reply:

"The country in which I grew up, that afforded such extraordinary opportunities to a young girl leaving home when she was 17, is a country that believes deeply in innocent before proven guilty. And what I most object to in all of this, is this rush to judgment for an individual who, by every account, has had an extraordinary career, has been an exemplary father, and a truly remarkably public servant. So I say, they should tell their stories. If she doesn't want to stand up and say what happened, with real facts, call the vote."

"The country in which I grew up, that afforded such extraordinary opportunities to a young girl leaving home when she was 17, is a country that believes deeply in innocent before proven guilty. And what I most object to in all of this, is this rush to judgment for an individual who, by every account, has had an extraordinary career, has been an exemplary father, and a truly remarkably public servant. So I say, they should tell their stories. If she doesn't want to stand up and say what happened, with real facts, call the vote."

By our count, the above audio is the first hit we've seen from what appears to be a Democrat-aligned tracker in District race. Such sneak attacks were, of course, commonplace on both sides ahead of last year's special election, but this year's race has gotten off to a much sleepier start. We've heard mumblings about Republican trackers showing up at recent McBath events as well.

As a House member, Karen Handel doesn't have a say in whether Kavanaugh will get confirmed. But her response to the recent allegations aligns pretty closely with what we've seen from most rank-and-file Republican senators, including U.S. Sen. David Perdue. The Republican on Monday evening said "all information needs to be considered" by the Senate Judiciary Committee, including the new allegations contained in the New Yorker article, but he also expressed a desire to move forward with Thursday's hearing rather than delay it as Democrats have suggested.

One subject Perdue did not want to weigh in on was Rod Rosenstein, the deputy attorney general who's said to be on the verge of leaving – or being fired from – the administration. Perdue said it was up to his ally President Trump and Attorney General Jeff Sessions to decide Rosenstein's fate. "There's so much innuendo out there. I'm not sure any of us have all the facts," he said.

One person who was happy about the reported departure was U.S. Rep. Jody Hice, R-Monroe. On Twitter, he called Rosenstein's exit "long overdue." The House Freedom Caucus member was one of nine conservatives to introduce articles of impeachment against Rosenstein earlier this summer.

When you're old enough, you can do this: WSB Radio's Jamie Dupree said he went back and found his notes from the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill hearing in 1991.

The owners of the lone remaining nuclear power plant under construction in the U.S. granted the project a slight reprieve on Monday, agreeing to proceed if, as one crucial partner demanded, a cap is placed on escalating costs.

That caveat came from Oglethorpe Power, which demanded that Southern Co. cover any costs associated with the Vogtle reactors that exceeded a limit of \$800 million higher than the latest \$27 billion estimate to finish the project.

That was welcome news to Stacey Abrams, the Democratic candidate for governor who said ratepayers and the 5,000 or so workers on the project "should not suffer because of corporate mismanagement."

"I am glad to see these companies recognize that additional burdens should not fall on ratepayers," she added.

Her Republican opponent, Brian Kemp, declined to comment on the project. A host of GOP leaders, including Gov. Nathan Deal and a majority of the Public Service Commission, have offered their full support for the expansion.

Stacey Abrams' took a swing through New York to raise more cash for her campaign for governor. She met with former New York Mayor Mike Bloomberg and shared cookies with New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo before hitting a fundraiser on billionaire Barry Diller's yacht.

We're a couple days late to this, but Hillary Clinton gave social media shoutouts to Stacey Abrams and Lucy McBath ahead of the weekend. In a series of tweets, the former presidential candidate linked to the Georgia Democrats' campaign websites. "Donate your time or money to their campaigns if you can," said Clinton. "Our government should represent us, and Congress is only 20% women right now. Let's change that ratio!" Clinton endorsed Abrams in May and McBath more quietly in July, a fact that Handel seized on in a recent fundraising note to supporters.

9. AJC

A reminder that the GOP can reach for immigrant voters -- if it wants them

By Jim Galloway

Tuesday, September 25

Only a few weeks ago, Democratically inclined residents of Midtown Atlanta discovered that the co-owner of a trendy Flying Biscuit franchise had made a \$2,000 cash contribution to Republican Brian Kemp's campaign for governor.

The blocks around 10th and Piedmont form the heart of a vibrant gay neighborhood, and Kemp has been a proponent of “religious liberty” legislation that many believe is intended to offer legal cover to businesses that don’t want to deal with same-sex couples.

The result was a culture clash and cries of boycott.

Even though said co-owner, Joseph Hsiao, made it plain that he had also supported LGBT political efforts, including the recent unsuccessful city council president candidacy of Alex Wan. Even though Hsiao argued that the only thing he admired about Kemp was his small business policy.

The incident was a reminder that, in a Georgia rapidly diversifying with settlers from outside the United States, many members of these incoming ethnic groups, and thus their offspring, might normally be predisposed to become Republicans.

That is, if that party weren’t advertising itself as inhospitable to so many of these newcomers, who are often more socially conservative and religious than the average American.

This is why more farsighted Republicans wince when they hear a White House speak of denying a green card to any lawful, permanent resident with a family member who has ever benefited from a legal social welfare program – like those offered by Obamacare. Or in Georgia, PeachCare health insurance coverage for kids.

The instincts and networks are there for Republicans. Last week, several Indian-American groups banded together to host a Dunwoody fundraiser for Kemp’s gubernatorial campaign. About 80 attended. Donations may have reached six figures.

One of the organizers was Chandra “CB” Yadav, who grew up near New Delhi, India, and arrived here in 1999 with \$50 in his pocket. He began in Woodbine, Ga., a sleepy town near the Georgia coast, and now owns restaurants, some small grocery stores and a few hotels.

His Facebook page includes a photo of himself, Vice President Mike Pence, and Kemp. Yadav is a supporter of President Donald Trump, but has a longer history with the Georgia GOP. He helped keep the party solvent with financial donations in 2015 and 2016. Counting in-kind contributions and cash, he gave more than \$1,500 to Gov. Nathan Deal’s campaign in 2014. He was an early supporter of Kemp’s gubernatorial ambitions, making his first donation in January 2016.

In a telephone interview, Yadav spoke warmly of GOP attitudes toward small business. But he was more passionate about another issue. “We oppose illegal immigration,” Yadav said. “We came legally.”

Small footnote: Last February, about 200 Indian-Americans demonstrated outside the White House, in favor of a new “merit-based” immigration policy proposed by President Trump and U.S. Sen. David Perdue, R-Ga., among others.

Organized by the Illinois-based Republican Hindu Coalition, the rally called for a higher priority on problems faced by immigrants in the United States legally, including a backlog of green card applications from holders of H1-B visas.

“The rule of law is important to them,” said former state senator Judson Hill of Marietta, one of the organizers of last week’s Indian-American fundraiser for Kemp. In his unsuccessful 2017 bid for the Sixth District congressional seat, Hill said various Indian-American groups held several fundraisers for him, at their homes and in a temple.

"If you own hotels or convenience stores or are in the health care profession, you're impacted by government on a daily basis," Hill said.

Foreign policy can play a role, too. Last July, businessman David Kim lost a Democratic runoff in the Seventh District congressional contest to Carolyn Bourdeaux, 52 to 48 percent.

The Seventh District is Gwinnett County-based. A 22-country explosion of immigrants is rapidly shifting its politics. Given that a significant slice of Gwinnett's population is Asian, Kim's status as a first-generation Korean-American was supposed to have given him a leg up.

But it might not have, he conceded this week.

Just as his nine-week runoff with Bourdeaux was taking shape, President Trump flew to Singapore for his meeting with North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un. Korean-Americans in the United States were transfixed at the possibility of the reunification of North and South.

"It's an important issue for older Koreans," Kim said. "My Mom was born during Reconstruction. And so she has relatives who are in their 80s and 90s — aunts and uncles that got separated arbitrarily during the war. There's quite a few families that suffer from that."

But this means that older Korean-Americans, the most likely to vote, also tilt Republican. "They definitely lean more toward hawks and hardliners when it comes to that. They feel like a conciliatory and appeasement approach — it's just not going to work. You're being taken advantage of," Kim said. "In terms of what the current president has been able to accomplish, there's a lot of credit being given to President Trump."

Likewise, a Cold War history has made immigrants from Taiwan more conservative than those from other portions of China. Latinos, now the largest new ethnic group in Gwinnett, have their fracture lines as well. Venezuelans fleeing economic disaster are likely to be more conservative than Puerto Ricans who sought refuge from Hurricane Maria, while Mexican-Americans may now be permanent residents of the Democratic camp.

Unifying these disparate groups can be demanding, regardless of political party, Kim said. The independence days celebrated by their countries of origin are convenient times to address new voters as a group — except for one problem.

"A lot of independence days are in August, coinciding with the end of World War II," Kim said. "India and Korea both celebrate their independence days on Aug. 15.

"To be able to hit every event, if you're trying to build a coalition amongst the immigration community — it takes an unbelievable amount of time and an unbelievable amount of money, all condensed in a very short period. That's one of the challenges, whether you're a Republican or a Democrat."

But gain the loyalty of these new Georgia voters, and you may inherit their children and grandchildren, too. It will take footwork and patience, but most importantly, it requires a decent welcome mat.

10. AJC

Georgia inspector general asked to look into gifts to state employees

By James Salzer

Tuesday, September 25

Georgia's inspector general has been asked to look into whether a group that did work for the Charter Schools Commission violated state law by not reporting that it paid for staffers to attend events across the country and offered them stipends.

The filing Tuesday comes less than three weeks after The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported the vendor gifts to state employees.

Teresa Rogers, a Sandy Springs charter school parent, asked the inspector general to investigate both the gifts and whether the vendor failed to file mandatory financial information with the state.

The complaint says the Chicago nonprofit — the National Association of Charter School Authorizers — could wind up being prohibited from doing business with the state for a year and forced to repay what it received from the State Charter Schools Commission if it did not file the financial statement.

Rogers asked the inspector general to investigate whether stipends paid to Charter Schools Commission staffers were legal.

Corrie Leech, the communications director for the association, said her organization didn't know about the reporting requirements and would comply in the future.

The AJC reported earlier this month that the association has been paid \$264,000 since early 2015 to help review charter petitions and applications, for consulting services, and other duties. The state commission has the power to approve or deny petitions for state charter schools and renew, not renew or terminate state charter school contracts.

According to agency emails reviewed by the AJC, the association has offered to pay Bonnie Holliday, the commission's director, and other senior staffers for them to attend conferences and group events since at least 2015.

The emails show Holliday and Gregg Stevens, the commission's deputy director and general counsel, submitted reimbursements to the association to pay for travel at least four times in 2017 in amounts higher than the \$250 that would trigger a requirement that the association file vendor gift disclosures.

On the day a consulting contract was being finalized in June 2017, the association offered Stevens \$1,000 as a "consulting stipend" and travel reimbursement to speak at a conference. Stevens turned down the payment.

Records show the association offered Holliday a \$1,000 "consulting/facilitating fee" in 2017 for a conference in Phoenix. She accepted the stipend.

Under Georgia law, "No public officer other than a public officer elected state wide shall accept a monetary fee or honorarium in excess of \$100 for a speaking engagement, participation in a seminar, discussion panel, or other activity which directly relates to the official duties of that public officer or the office of that public officer."

Gov. Nathan Deal signed an executive order on his first day in office banning gifts worth more than \$25 to state employees under his command. Under the gift ban, employees are not allowed to take "honoraria," or payments.

However, in a written response, Lauren Holcomb, the commission's communications director, said Holliday was asked to lead a session at the conference, forcing her to develop content and an agenda, organize speakers and present information, among other duties. She said those duties were outside the scope of Holliday's job with the state, for which she was paid \$125,000 in fiscal 2017.

“Our general counsel determined that it was legal and appropriate for her to accept a stipend in this circumstance as the stipend did not fall within the definition of a ‘gift’ or ‘honoraria’ as defined by the governor’s executive order,” Holcomb said.

After the complaint was filed Tuesday, Holcomb said in a statement, “The SCSC conducts business in accordance with high standards of transparency and objectivity and remains committed to partnering with reputable non-profit organizations to further the agency’s mission.”

As the AJC reported, very few vendors that do business with the state file required gift reports, and no one has faced a penalty for not disclosing what they spend on state employees in almost 20 years.

The recent ethics scandal at Georgia Tech spotlighted the relationship between vendors that do business with the state and its employees.

Reports released earlier this summer said that four high-ranking, highly paid Georgia Tech administrators committed a series of ethical abuses, including receiving pay from a German company to serve on its board at the same time the company was being paid to do work for Georgia Tech, and playing golf with vendors during work hours.

Georgia Tech President George P. “Bud” Peterson fired an executive vice president, and the other three resigned.

An internal report found that Paul Strouts, then-vice president of campus services, had Barnes & Noble pay \$35,000 a year, starting in 2013, for a Georgia Tech football suite. Barnes & Noble operates a bookstore on campus.

University System of Georgia officials say the box was worked into the company’s commission to the school, so it would not have fallen under the heading of a “gift” and therefore Barnes & Noble didn’t need to file a vendor disclosure.

11. Rockdale Citizen

Give teachers credit for student gains

By Rep. Dave Belton

Tuesday, September 25

In the fall of 2002, a prominent newspaper led with this headline ...

“Georgia Ranks 50th on SAT”

My, how things have changed.

ou probably haven’t heard, but Georgia teachers have made incredible gains in the past few years. Georgia now boasts the 13th best Advanced Placement scores in America, we’ve topped the nation in the ACT for two years in a row, and for the first time in history, we beat the nation in two-thirds of the SAT. Even better, our graduation rate skyrocketed 18 points (28 percent) in the past few years to a best-ever 82 percent. Newton County boasts a record 87 percent, up four points from a year ago and well above the state average.

If a business posted such epic gains, it would celebrate ... loudly. The CEO would brag about his great workers and financially reward their productivity. Rival businesses would tempt these workers away with big, fat salaries. Buoyed by the praise, these workers would be justly proud of the job they were

doing.

Not so in public education. Instead, Georgia teachers feel harassed and disrespected.

Recent studies bear this out. New teacher enrollment is down 20 percent, “Baby Boom” teachers are retiring in record numbers (we lost 7,000 in the last few years), and 44 percent of new teachers leave during their first five years. Class sizes are bursting at the seams (2,500 positions went unfilled last year) as turnover has risen to a crippling 16 percent. That means principals have to re-hire nearly one fifth of their staffs ... every single year. Such rampant turnover would crush most businesses. Even worse, morale is so poor that most Georgia teachers do not recommend the teaching profession to their own students.

This poses a huge problem as the number of children in Georgia climbs and climbs. Believe it or not, nearly 1 in 4 people in Georgia is a child.

We need a lot more teachers in Georgia, not less.

Adding to the problem are pundits – on the Left and the Right – who make a career out of ridiculing teachers for every cultural ill. Students spend less than 10 percent of their childhood in a classroom, yet teachers are blamed for 100 percent of their bad behavior. Somehow, parents are no longer responsible for their own children; teachers are.

The truth is, the “great teachers of your childhood” are still out there. They’re doing a magnificent job teaching a harder curriculum to a more diverse population than ever before. Parents who actually have children know this: 70 percent of them grade their schools as excellent. Adults who don’t have kids rank schools at a dismal 19 percent.

The conclusion is obvious. People who actually interact with teachers are genuinely impressed. On the other hand, people who don’t have any experience with today’s teachers rely on tired clichés.

It’s one of the reasons teaching has never been harder than it is right now. The “great teachers of your childhood” didn’t have to worry about standardized testing, gangs, bad behavior, unsupportive parents, mountains of paperwork, an ever-expanding bureaucracy, or partisan fights. Yet despite these challenges, today’s Georgia teacher is putting out a quantifiably better product than ever before.

My daughter is a teacher. I can’t tell you how proud I am of her. I hear the enthusiasm in her voice when she talks about a child she’s reached. I see the determination in her eyes when she talks about a child she knows she can inspire. We need to empower passionate teachers; give them control of their classrooms and watch them go.

Education has improved during Governor Deal’s tenure more than in any other time in our state’s history. The General Assembly dedicates over half of its budget to education every single year, including adding half a billion dollars every year during the last decade and \$2.5 billion in the last three years to education. In fact, 80 percent of the new monies collected in the past few years have been dedicated to education. So, while education should always be a non-partisan issue, business-minded Republicans (in particular) should be cheering the best-ever, historic and measurable victories of our Georgia teachers.

You can either invest in teachers ... or prison guards. I believe teachers are a better bet.

12. All On Georgia

The 5 Constitutional Amendments on the November 2018 Ballot

By Jessica Szilagyi

Tuesday, September 25

5 Constitutional Amendments to the State Constitution will appear on the November general election ballot. Are you informed about what those ballot questions mean?

Here's a brief rundown.

Amendment 1 — Portion of Revenue from Outdoor Recreation Equipment Sales Tax Dedicated to Land Conservation Fund Amendment

This would give the state the authority to dedicate “up to” 80% of the existing sales and use tax on outdoor sporting goods to be used for land conservation. This was initially supposed to happen when the sales tax was put into place, but never occurred. The “up to” 80% language means the legislature is still not required to allocate the tax money but can allocated up to that percentage.

The funds would be used to support state parks and trails, provide stewardship of conservation lands, and acquire land for the provision or protection of clean water, wildlife, hunting, fishing, military installation buffering, or outdoor recreation. These initiatives would be carried out by creating the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund, which would be handled by the state. 40% of the 80% allocated would go to this fund.

It will appear on the ballot as follows:

Without increasing the current state sales tax rate, shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended so as to create the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund to conserve lands that protect drinking water sources and the water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams; to protect and conserve forests, fish, wildlife habitats, and state and local parks; and to provide opportunities for our children and families to play and enjoy the outdoors, by dedicating, subject to full public disclosure, up to 80 percent of the existing sales tax collected by sporting goods stores to such purposes without increasing the current state sales tax rate?

Voting yes means you support allowing the state to authorize up to 80% of the sales tax for outdoor goods for conservation.

Voting no means you oppose support allowing the state to authorize up to 80% of the sales tax for outdoor goods for conservation.

The Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Coalition is one of the main sponsors of this amendment as is The Georgia Conservancy.

Opponents of the amendment say it doesn't go far enough or have enough enforcement teeth to require the money actually be used for conservation. It simply allows the state to send the money to the fund if it chooses.

Amendment 2 – Business Court Creation

Amendment 2 would create a new court system in the state of Georgia, specifically for businesses. This will allow judges in the business court to be APPOINTED not ELECTED. All judges would be appointed by the Governor and there would be no limit on how long a judge could serve.

It will appear on the ballot as follows:

Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended so as to create a state-wide business court, authorize

superior court business court divisions, and allow for the appointment process for state-wide business court judges in order to lower costs, improve the efficiency of all courts, and promote predictability of judicial outcomes in certain complex business disputes for the benefit of all citizens of this state?

Voting yes means you support amending the Constitution to authorize the state to create a state business court and would set the rules, term length and qualifications of the court.

Voting no means you oppose amending the Constitution to authorize the state to create a state business court which would appoint judges by way of the Governor, set the rules, term length and qualifications of the court.

This Amendment was sponsored by the Governor's floor leaders and others, including Representatives Chuck Efration, Terry Rogers, Trey Rhodes, Christian Coomer, Wendell Willard, and Barry Fleming. All are Republicans.

Governor Nathan Deal told WABE that, "A constitutional created business court would provide an efficient and dependable forum for litigants in every corner of our state." This is a measure that was part of his Court Reform Council in his earlier years as governor. The amendment has the support of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce and is being pushed by "Georgians for Lawsuit Reform."

Amendment 3 – Forest Land and Timberland Conservation

This amendment would revise current law by subclassifying forest land conservation use property for ad valorem taxation purposes. It would also change the method for establishing the value of forest land conservation use property and related assistance grants.

Amendment 3 will appear on the ballot as follows:

Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended so as to revise provisions related to the subclassification for tax purposes of and the prescribed methodology for establishing the value of forest land conservation use property and related assistance grants, to provide that assistance grants related to forest land conservation use property may be increased by general law for a five-year period and that up to 5 percent of assistance grants may be deducted and retained by the state revenue commissioner to provide for certain state administrative costs, and to provide for the subclassification of qualified timberland property for ad valorem taxation purposes?

Voting yes means you support allowing the legislature to change the formula used to calculate the tax on forest land conservation use property and create a new land designation for commercial timberland. This also allows the state to establish a percentage of local grant assistance funding that could be retained by the state for administration.

Voting no means you oppose allowing the legislature to change the formula used to calculate the tax on forest land conservation use property and create a new land designation for commercial timberland. This also allows the state to establish a percentage of local grant assistance funding that could be retained by the state for administration.

The bill is supported by the Georgia Forestry Commission and Governor Deal. Andres Villegas, president and CEO of the Georgia Forestry Association was quoted saying, "For more than 100 years, the Georgia Forestry Association has been instrumental in timber tax legislation, which has positioned the state as a global leader in forestry. Thanks to the leadership of our elected officials and Governor Deal, we can, once again, ensure that our tax policy supports the growth and vitality of our working forests and the communities that depend on them."

Amendment 4 – Marsy’s Law/Victim’s Rights

Amendment 4, known as Marsy’s Law, addresses rights of victims of crime. It is part of a national effort to add additional rights and privileges for victims of crime.

The amendment allows, upon request, crime victims to have specific rights, including the right to be treated with “fairness, dignity, and respect;” the right to notice of all proceedings involving the alleged criminal; the right to be heard at any proceedings involving that release, plea, or sentencing of the accused; and the right to be informed of their rights. The amendment also explicitly stated that the legislature was able to further define, expand, and provide for the enforcement of the rights.

The amendment will appear on the ballot as follows:

Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended so as to provide certain rights to victims against whom a crime has allegedly been perpetrated and allow victims to assert such rights?

Voting yes means you support adding more rights of victims of crimes to the State Constitution, known as Marsy’s Law.

Voting no means you oppose adding more rights of victims of crimes to the State Constitution, known as Marsy’s Law.

Marsy’s Law for Georgia is a special advocacy organization created just for this bill and is the main sponsor. The amendment is endorsed by a number of victims’ rights groups.

Joe Mulholland, a judge in South Georgia, told his local paper that the amendment is technically already part of the law. “It’s already technically part of Georgia law, but the legislature felt like being a part of the constitution is even stronger. Having that and knowing its part of the constitution, I think it gives peace of mind to prosecutors.”

The Georgia Public Policy Foundation, a nonpartisan think tank, has voiced concerns about the unintended consequences of the law, even penning a piece on it. You can read that here, but among the concerns are 1) additional attorney costs and costs for support staff for victims, 2) the risk of infringing the rights of someone accused of a crime, 3) an increase in false accusations, and seemingly most severe, the accused could “lose their right to be presumed innocent until convicted.”

The Georgia Public Policy Foundation also said in an article published on their website that “A constitutional amendment is no place to risk infringing the rights of someone accused of a crime. The accused have the presumption of innocence until convicted; their life and liberty are at stake. For many suffering victims and their surviving families, there’s a fine line between justice based on a court of law and vengeance based on the alleged wrongdoing.”

Amendment 5 – School Sales Tax Referendums

Amendment 5 is the School Sales Tax Referendums Amendment. This amendment, if passed, would allow school districts or groups of school districts within a county to call for a sales and use tax referendum. For example: Fulton County and Atlanta City Schools or Cobb County and City of Marietta Schools.

The sales tax would be used for the educational purposes of the school districts and would be 1%. The term could be upwards of 5 years.

It will appear on the ballot as follows:

Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended so as to authorize a referendum for a sales and use tax for education by a county school district or an independent school district or districts within the county having a majority of the students enrolled within the county and to provide that the proceeds are distributed on a per student basis among all the school systems unless an agreement is reached among such school systems for a different distribution?

Voting yes means you support the amendment to allow a school district or districts with a majority of enrolled students within a county to call for a referendum to levy a sales tax for education purposes.

Voting no means you oppose the amendment to allow a school district or districts with a majority of enrolled students within a county to call for a referendum to levy a sales tax for education purposes.

Ballotpedia quotes Senator Ellis Black, a sponsor of the Amendment, in an interview saying, “the measure was designed to put provisions in place so that a school system with a majority of the full-time equivalent (FTE) students can place a renewal of an ESPLOST on the ballot before voters without having to ask all the systems within a county. Black also said the measure was designed to prevent a smaller school system from essentially blackmailing a larger school system within the county from passing a resolution to place an ESPLOST renewal on the ballot, and similarly, that it would stop a larger school system from preventing smaller systems from putting the issue before voters.”

The bill passed 33-17 down party lines.

Two referendums that are not constitutional amendments will also appear on the ballot, but we’ll cover those – and what they mean – in another piece.

Early voting begins October 15th and Election Day is November 6th.

13. Brunswick News

Finance committee to consider expenditure for beach restoration projects

By Taylor Cooper

Wednesday, September 26

The Glynn County Finance Committee is expected to consider recommending the Glynn County Commission take the next step in using beach restoration funding provided by the state when it meets today.

Gov. Nathan Deal signed a bill in March setting aside \$10 million for beach renourishment and restoration.

The county recently accepted \$2.5 million of the grant, awarded by the state Department of Community Affairs through the OneGeorgia Authority. Jekyll and Tybee islands received \$2.5 million and \$5 million, respectively.

The money isn’t awarded all at once, but is doled out in reimbursements for eligible projects including studies, planning, consulting or engineering activities, construction and reconstruction of beaches and dunes, including dredging and placement of sand; installation of rock revetments and “other activities deemed appropriate” by the authority.

According to a finance committee memo, county staff members are seeking permission to request the services of a contractor to make suggestions on how to use the money and draw up designs for projects.

"We're going to do a request for proposal to figure out what needs to be done," said Public Works Director Dave Austin.

The county has some idea of what it wants and needs to do to restore local dunes and revetments, but Austin said they want to consider all alternatives.

"We'll hopefully get someone in here to give us some kind of design so we can let out a construction contract," Austin said.

The committee is also expected to consider recommending an expenditure of \$14,000 in change orders to the Glynn County Tax Commissioner's office renovation project.

County commissioners set aside \$300,000 for the full renovations in 2017. If approved, the expenditure would leave \$192,000 left for the project.

Also on the agenda is \$130,000 to refinish metal shelving and repair and refinish tables, chairs and end panels for the Brunswick-Glynn County Library, a request to reject a \$384,000 bid for special-purpose, local-option sales tax-funded dirt road paving, a \$71,000 contract with Jim Rich for veterinary services at the Glynn County Animal Control shelter and a \$245,000 purchase order for an ambulance.

The meeting is scheduled for 2 p.m. Wednesday on the second floor of the Harold Pate Building, 1725 Reynolds St. in Brunswick.

14. Rockdale Newton Citizen

Massey honored by Conyers City Council as his tenure as Municipal Court judge ends

By Aimee Jones

Monday, September 24

Former Chief Municipal Court Judge Terry Massey was specially recognized last week by the Conyers City Council for his tenure presiding over the city's court for more than two decades.

Mayor Vince Evans read a proclamation naming Wednesday, Sept. 19, 2018, as Terry N. Massey Day in Conyers in honor of his time in the Municipal Court.

Massey was appointed July 18 by Gov. Nathan Deal to a Superior Court judgeship in the Ocmulgee Judicial Circuit, filling the vacancy created by Judge Trenton Brown's appointment to the Georgia Court of Appeals.

Massey graduated with his law degree in 1990 from the University of Georgia and soon after opened his law firm, Massey Law Firm LLC in Conyers. He was appointed the Conyers Municipal Court judge in 1995.

Upon accepting the proclamation at Wednesday's City Council meeting, Massey said it was a great pleasure to serve the citizens of Conyers for the past 23 years.

"One of the toughest things of taking this new position is that I was leaving home," he said.

Massey said he had two clients in particular that made the decision especially difficult, with the city of Conyers being the hardest one to leave.

He thanked the City Council for giving him latitude in how he ran his court. Massey said that he and the court staff understood that people who showed up to court were not there because they wanted to be.

"We tried to listen to the people," Massey said. "We understood what their problems were. Thank you for the opportunity to listen and to practice the judicial guidance I did. You will always be a part of my life."

15. Brunswick News

Bailey seeks to prosecute, protect as AG

By Wes Wolfe

Wednesday, September 26

Charlie Bailey, the Democratic nominee for state attorney general, wants to take his experience as a senior assistant district attorney prosecuting gang crimes in Fulton County, and his work on behalf of the state in Gov. Roy Barnes' administration, and reinvigorate the attorney general's office, he said during a campaign swing through Brunswick earlier this week.

"The vast majority of the people get up every day and they go to work in Georgia, and if they're lucky, they're working one job," Bailey said. "But many of them — far too many of them — are working two and three jobs. And they're doing that to try to provide a little better life for their kids than they had, and they can't quite do it. And they can't quite do it because there's powerful forces arrayed against them, and they come in the form of organized crime, gangs, human trafficking. They come in the form of special interests, pharmaceutical companies, payday lenders, predatory debt collectors, oil companies.

"They exploit them and they come in the form of the insider politicians that care more about their seat in government and protecting those special interests than they do about protecting the people of Georgia. What I am saying, because the one entity, if you were to say, 'Who is the one person that is supposed to be standing in-between those Georgians who are getting up every day and going to work and trying to make life a little bit better, and these forces that make it harder for them to do that,' and that's the attorney general."

Bailey draws a sharp distinction between himself and the Republican incumbent, Chris Carr. Gov. Nathan Deal appointed Carr to the post, which he assumed on Nov. 1, 2016. Carr previously served as vice president of the Georgia Public Policy Foundation and as U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson's chief of staff.

Bailey said Carr's a nice person and that they have a number of mutual friends, but said Carr's never been a prosecutor, tried a case, argued a motion before a judge and hasn't practiced law for 17 years.

"(The attorney general is) the sword and the shield of the state," Bailey said. "You're supposed — well, you're supposed to be a lawyer — you're supposed to know something about these things. You're supposed to have some experience doing these things, as I do, and my opponent does not. But, you're supposed to use the law to protect people.

"And then if they're hurt, whether that's by violent organized crime syndicate or gang, or by a special interest that exploits them and takes money out of their pocket, you are the one — nobody else — you are the one that's supposed to get them justice. Because you are the only one that has statewide jurisdiction as a statewide prosecutor and chief law enforcement official in the state. You are the only one who can file suit on behalf of the people of Georgia."

Bailey pointed out he worked in the largest and busiest district attorney's office in the Southeast as a gang prosecutor in Fulton County, and that he would create — for the first time in the state's history, an organized crime and gang division within the attorney general's office.

"The role of the state is this — it's not to supplant what's being done, what was done by me and (the

Atlanta police) and Fulton County PD and Sandy Springs PD,” Bailey said. “You don’t supplant that. It’s not to supplant what’s being done by the U.S. attorneys. ... But you are the only one — there’s no individual DA’s office, no individual chief of police or sheriff or even U.S. attorney — has statewide jurisdiction. And so, you’re the one that provides that.”

In regard to medical marijuana, Bailey said the message from his office would be that district attorneys should exercise prosecutorial discretion. He said that if elected, he would advocate for “the legalization of the cultivation, development, distribution, sale and use — with a doctor’s prescription — of medicinal marijuana and cannabis oil.”

16. Union-Recorder

A proud moment to remember

By Brenda Brown

Tuesday, September 25

I have known Nicolas Todd Collins all of his life; in fact, his mother and I have been friends all our lives, beginning when we were infants and introduced by our dads. Nick Todd and my sons, Scott and Arlin, are near the same age. Marcia and I were working moms and wives and we shared our journey over the years as the families grew up.

Our family lived in Richland when the Collins family relocated from the Atlanta area to Tallahassee when Marcia came to visit her parents; we got together, so our boys saw each other frequently over the years.

Scott and Todd even went camping several times out on the French place that was owned at that time by Todd’s maternal grandfather, Mr. Mott Murrah.

We watched Nick Todd as he served as a Marine, contracted to train citizen soldiers in Afghanistan, and then became a deputy sheriff in Webster County. We were delighted when he decided to seek admission to attend Trooper School in Forsyth at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center.

It was a privilege and honor to be asked to participate in a detailed interview during his selection process. Then, we waited as he endured those long 32 weeks of training that we knew tested all the candidates to their physical and mental limits. At the completion of Trooper School, they will have received more than 1,500 hours of training that includes defensive driving, criminal law, and firearms.

I was delighted to be invited to attend the graduation ceremony of the 103rd Georgia State Patrol Trooper School on Friday, Sept. 21, 2018, where the commencement address was presented by the Governor of Georgia, Nathan Deal, who was accompanied by the First Lady of Georgia, Mrs. Sandra Deal.

Because Nick served as the bearer of the Class Pennant, he participated in the ceremony to return the guide on to the school, which gave him the privilege of entering the auditorium at the front of the formation and being the first to receive the issue of the “round hat.”

I did not know that a pivotal part of the ceremony is when the troopers “don” their service hats, but I can tell you that it brings tears, shouts of jubilation from the audience, and a standing ovation when it occurs.

What an awesome ceremony.

Seeing troopers cross the stage and receive their diplomas was something I will never forget and I know Nick was thrilled that the long journey is finally over. There are so many memorable parts that it is

difficult to list them all but one that I will never forget is when we entered onto the campus and saw 48 blue and grey patrol cars lined up as a welcome to the visitors.

The presenting of challenge coins is something that I am familiar with and I am the proud owner of a shiny new coin from Trooper No. 280.

Nick and Candace were honored Thursday evening with a dinner at Buckner's Family Restaurant.

17. Marietta Daily Journal

Cobb Superior Court mandating electronic filing starting Oct. 1

Tuesday, September 25

Attorneys and others filing documents for civil cases in Cobb County Superior Court will be required to do so electronically starting Monday.

Superior Court Clerk Rebecca Keaton has announced the transition from permissive electronic filing — attorneys have been able to file documents electronically in the Cobb Judicial Circuit since April 2016 — to mandatory electronic filing.

Attorneys will now be required to use the PeachCourt eFiling platform to electronically submit civil documents at peachcourt.com, with the system available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Both attorneys and non-attorneys may register for a PeachCourt account at no cost, with any PeachCourt user having the ability to search for and view civil case dockets at no cost.

Users who need assistance will be able to reach live PeachCourt support between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The transition, Keaton's office said, has benefits to attorneys, court staff and the general public.

"Electronic filing saves time and reduces cost for the courts, which ultimately benefits the taxpayers who support the courts," read the statement from Keaton's office. "Electronic documents are easier than paper documents for the general public, attorneys and judges to access. Additionally, storing documents in an electronic format saves physical space compared to storing paper files, which is a major concern for every court in the state."

Cobb's transition comes months ahead of a Jan. 1 deadline for Georgia's 159 Superior Courts and 70 State Courts to transition to mandatory electronic filing in civil cases — a date that had been set by Gov. Nathan Deal's signing of Senate Bill 407 into law back in May.

The PeachCourt eFiling platform debuted in 2014 and serves more than 180 State and Superior Courts across Georgia, or nearly 80 percent of Georgia's trial courts, according to Keaton's office. The platform also provides access to more than 10 million documents from trial courts across the state.

PeachCourt is a registered trademark of GreenCourt Legal Technologies LLC, a Carrollton-based, privately-held company.

18. Cartersville Patch

GHC To Host Open House For Cartersville Academic Building

By Kristal Dixon

Tuesday, September 25

Georgia Highlands College will open its new academic building at its Cartersville campus next month during a ribbon cutting and open house. The event will be held from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 16.

The 52,000-square foot building has a full slate of classes planned for spring 2019 and will be focused on STEAM-based areas of study. GHC pursued funding for the building and was approved under the fiscal year 2017 state budget which was approved by Legislature and signed by Gov. Nathan Deal.

"We would like to especially thank our legislators for all they do to support GHC, the USG and education in the state," said Vice President for Advancement Mary Transue, who also serves in GHC's Government Relations role. "Without their tireless support and dedication, this venture would not have been possible."

GHC received \$22.5 million in state funding to advance the project: \$2.2 million for design, \$17.7 million for construction and \$2.6 million for equipment. The new academic building was designed by the Stanley Beaman & Sears architecture firm and is being constructed by Juneau.

"The addition of this new academic building will include spaces for laboratories, classrooms, a lecture hall, study rooms and more," President Don Green said. "This increases GHC's ability to directly impact and support the community workforce through STEAM-based degrees, and it allows GHC to better serve as the University System of Georgia's primary access institution in the region."

Green added that the building will also contribute to raising GHC's nearly \$150 million economic impact in Northwest Georgia. GHC has five locations across Northwest Georgia in Rome, Cartersville, Marietta, Dallas and Douglasville. He stated that the building also strengthens and broadens GHC's ability to maintain a strong relationship with K-12 school systems across Northwest Georgia.

19. Associated Press

Georgia's top 2 courts see diluted diversity for blacks

Tuesday, September 25

Georgia's governor has expanded the state Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals by adding five jurists in a series of moves that reduced the representation of blacks on the two courts and the representation of women on the high court.

Gov. Nathan Deal has had twenty opportunities to choose members of those courts since becoming governor in 2011 and has chosen a white person 18 times, according to the Fulton County Daily Report.

Primarily because of those decisions, blacks on Georgia's top two courts, and women on the state Supreme Court, will have less influence when Deal leaves office than when he arrived.

When Deal took office, the Supreme Court had two black members among seven justices, for a 29 percent proportion. Now with nine members, the court still has only two black jurists, for a 22 percent share. At the Court of Appeals, the number of African-American members also has stayed at two while the court grew by three judges to 15.

Lawyer Wayne Kendall said Deal was continuing a pattern of "ethnically cleansing" the judiciary in Georgia with respect to African-American judges. He said the trend has been so discouraging that many qualified African-American lawyers will no longer even apply.

Georgia's population is about 30 percent black.

A spokesman told the newspaper that Deal and administration officials did not have any comments on diversity on the top courts or Deal's recent appointments to them.

Criticism of Deal's record on diversity in the judiciary contrasts with widespread credit he has received for leading the creation of more than 140 "accountability" courts around the state, which help mostly nonviolent criminals recover from addiction and other problems without further clogging jails and prisons.

The Georgia Supreme Court had one woman when Deal became governor. It is expected to have one woman when Deal leaves office, even as the high court has grown from seven to nine seats.

But Deal's appointments at the appeals court doubled the number of women from three to six, pushing the proportion from 27 percent to 40 percent. Deal also tapped one Asian-American judge, so the overall minority influence at the appeals court grew from 18 percent to 20 percent.

Diversity advocates were hoping for more representation in March, when Randy Evans, former co-chair to Deal's Judicial Nominating Commission, urged women and minorities to apply for a spate of open appeals court judgeships.

The JNC recommended a 13-member shortlist for the state Court of Appeals, including four women and four African-Americans. The governor chose two white men and one white woman.

Evans declined to comment on the governor's choices.

In June, the JNC began developing a shortlist for the state Supreme Court. Justice Britt Grant had been expecting confirmation by the Senate to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit and Chief Justice Harris Hines was planning to retire.

The JNC in July recommended nine candidates, including five women, one of whom was African-American.

Deal appointed Sarah Warren, a white woman, to replace Grant. He later appointed Court of Appeals Judge Charlie Bethel, a white man, to replace Hines.

Charles Johnson, an advocate for greater racial diversity on the courts, said he can't fault the JNC for the governor's picks. The panel, he said, "gave the governor every opportunity to pick a qualified minority candidate."

20. Georgia Voice

Picket Patrol: Pence & Kemp in ATL the Day Before Pride

By Berlin Sylvestre

Monday, September 24

As brilliantly reported by Patrick Saunders, editor of Atlanta's beloved Project Q, Mike "I Goofed On My Own State's Economy By Enacting Religious-Freedom Bills" Pence will be stumping in Atlanta for gubernatorial hopeful Brian "Truckin' Out Illegals Myself With My Big Ol' Pickup" via a ... "Victory Dinner."

(Not to be a superstitious type, but calling a victory against LGBTQ-friendly Stacy Abrams this early out has that "tattoo your boyfriend's name on your neck" feel.)

Here's a quick rundown:

Who's Going? Mike Pence, Brian Kemp, Gov. Nathan Deal, U.S. Sens. Johnny Isakson and David Perdue, House Speaker David Ralston, Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle, and others.

Where They Going? The Grand Hyatt in Atlanta.

When They Going? The evening before Pride, Oct. 11. (Seriously.)

Who's Not Allowed: Members of the press, according to Kemp spokesman Ryan Mahoney.

Crazy, right?

On one hand, it's a little sad to see Nathan Deal in attendance. He, after all, vetoed the religious-freedom (read: pro-LGBTQ discrimination) nonsense after it passed our state's House and Senate. On the other, perhaps he can speak to why it'd just be bad legislation for our state, from not only an economical standpoint, but from a progressive one. We'll see.

For those who love a good reason to get out there and give 'em hell, this one's for you.

GA News

1. Atlanta Business Chronicle

No decision yet on fate of Plant Vogtle expansion

By David Allison

Wednesday, September 26

The fate of the expansion of Plant Vogtle remains undecided Wednesday morning.

All four of the Vogtle co-owners -- Georgia Power, MEAG Power, Dalton Utilities and Oglethorpe Power - have agreed to extend the voting deadline to today at 5 p.m. "to finalize details of an agreement among the co-owners and seek necessary approvals."

Talks between the companies had an original deadline of 5 p.m. Tuesday, but that was extended until 7 p.m. and then 11:30 p.m.

"So much is on the line with the Vogtle project in regard to America's nuclear dominance in the world. I am glad the co-owners are working tirelessly to come to an agreement to continue," Georgia Public Service Commissioner Tim Echols told Atlanta Business Chronicle.

"I am very confident that Georgia Power and the Southern Company will move heaven and earth to save this project," he added. "If Georgia cancels the project, China and Russia only grow more powerful and influential in the world."

"Building carbon-free generation resources is the way of the future, and Georgia has come too far to give up," Echols said. "One day there will be a carbon tax in place and we'll be glad we have these additional nuclear units."

2. Atlanta Business Chronicle

Amazon looking to fill 1,200-plus jobs at new Georgia sortation center

By Eric Mandel

Tuesday, September 25

Amazon is looking to add more than 1,200 part-time positions at its new sortation center in Jefferson and is hosting hiring events next month to fill those voids.

[Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) Inc. (Nasdaq: AMZN) is inviting candidates to the Jefferson Civic Center from Oct. 1 through Oct. 20 to help complete an application and/or schedule a follow-up appointment. The Seattle-based online retail giant said there will be on-the-spot job offers to applicants who meet the qualifications.

Amazon, valued at \$1 trillion, has faced scrutiny over working conditions at its warehouses, and the Washington Post reported Monday that the company is fighting back against that image by offering raises of 25 to 55 cents an hour.

The company said that its associates are scheduled to work 20-29 hours per week, and receive health benefits after 90 days, "competitive wages," holiday pay, and perks including an employee discount.

Atlanta Business Chronicle reported in May that Amazon is working on a site for a \$75 million-to-\$100 million multi-story fulfillment center — its latest metro Atlanta project.

Starting almost three years ago, the company started ramping up projects in metro Atlanta. That includes fulfillment centers in Jefferson and new offices in Buckhead.

Earlier this year, Atlanta was named one of 20 cities competing to land Amazon's \$5 billion HQ2 project.

Georgia was said to have offered at least \$1 billion in incentives and infrastructure improvements in its pitch to land Amazon.

3. Atlanta Business Chronicle

Georgia wood pellet maker invests \$15M in 4th plant

By Jessica Saunders

Wednesday, September 26

A Georgia wood pellet supplier is investing \$15 million in a production facility in Brantley County, Ga.

Archer Forest Products, a division of Hazlehurst-based Fram Renewable Fuels, chose Brantley for its strategic location. The investment is expected to create 35 jobs, according to the Georgia Department of Economic Development.

"We are thrilled that Archer Forest Products is expanding their footprint in Georgia and Brantley County," said GDEcD Commissioner Pat Wilson. "Georgia is the number one forestry state in the nation and I am pleased that this leading company is continuing to take advantage of our incredible resources."

Fram was established in 2005 as a supplier of wood pellets to the growing European industrial market.

"Archer Forest Products, LLC is a very important project to the Fram Renewable Fuels Family due to its strategic location. Archer Forest Products LLC will be supplying wood pellets to help Fram Renewable Fuels to meet increasing demand," Harold L. Arnold, president of Fram Fuels, said in a statement. "We would like to thank the Development Authority, County Commissioner, the City of Nahunta, and the Tax Assessor for helping us through the process of acquiring Archer Forest Products LLC. We look forward to working with the community."

The timeline for the plant's opening was not disclosed.

4. AJC

South Fulton Mayor chosen for Transit Link Authority Board

By Pamela Miller

Wednesday, September 26

City of South Fulton Mayor William “Bill” Edwards was elected with a unanimous vote to serve as the District 8 representative to The ATL - Atlanta-region Transit Link Authority, according to a press release.

Mayor Edwards was nominated and ran uncontested during the District 8 Mayoral Caucus meeting held at Miller Zell located in the City of South Fulton. District 8 includes parts of Cobb, Fulton and Douglas counties. These districts intentionally cross county boundaries.

Edwards will serve on the election caucus board for the new ATL which is comprised of multiple elected officials throughout 10 different transit districts.

This group is responsible for selecting a representative to serve on the ATL’s Board of Directors.

The ATL was birthed after the passing of HB930 in the General Assembly on March 29, 2018 and after the Governor signed the legislation into law on May 3, 2018. This move created the new regional governance and funding structure called ATL

The ATL is a unifying entity that ensures coordinated planning and funding of transit across Metro Atlanta and oversees all transit activity to increase transparency around regional transit planning funding and operations.

5. AJC

Updated: Delta flights returning to normal after nationwide ground stop due to IT problem

By Kelly Yamanouchi

Wednesday, September 26

Delta Air Lines said its operations were returning to normal Tuesday evening after a nationwide ground stop caused by a technology problem.

Atlanta-based Delta said after 9 p.m. that it had restored all of its information technology systems after a problem affected some of them. The problem had started earlier in the evening.

Delta said it was working to rebook passengers whose flights were disrupted.

“We apologize to all customers for this inconvenience,” the company said in a written statement.

With the systems restored, passengers are able to check their flight status on Delta’s website or app, and check in and book flights.

According to the Federal Aviation Administration air traffic control system command center, Delta had requested that all departing traffic not be allowed to depart until 8:45 p.m. Eastern.

Another FAA status update showed that Delta requested that departing flights destined for Delta hubs at Hartsfield-Jackson International and New York’s JFK and LaGuardia airports not be allowed depart until 9:45 p.m. or later.

The ground stop did not affect flights in the air.

On Twitter, frustrated passengers raised concerns about their flights being delayed.

Hartsfield-Jackson posted on Twitter that at the Atlanta airport, only Delta was affected.

The problem also affected customers trying to book flights on Delta's website.

6. AJC

DeKalb denies its part of 'Project Rocket' proposal

By Tyler Estep

Tuesday, September 25

DeKalb commissioners voted Tuesday night to deny the zoning adjustments necessary for a small part of the massive — and mysterious — "Project Rocket" to be built in their county.

The vote raises plenty of questions and may complicate things moving forward. But it appeared unlikely to nix the entire Gwinnett-based project, which involves a 2.5-million-square-foot warehouse and distribution facility expected to create more than 1,000 jobs.

"Most likely not," said Laurel David, an attorney representing the project, "but we'd have to go back to the end user and the developer."

The code-named project — whose ultimate tenant has not been revealed — would be built primarily on 78 acres along West Park Place Boulevard in nearby Gwinnett County. The entirety of the actual building, in fact, would be within Gwinnett boundaries, and that county's commission approved last week the height variance necessary for it to be built.

Plans, though, also call for a private drive to be built from the facility out to Bermuda Drive — through a roughly 12-acre chunk of DeKalb County. About three dozen of the development's 1,800 parking spaces are also proposed to be in DeKalb.

In order to build the private drive, which would be one of three means of entering and exiting the facility, developers were seeking a tweak to zoning requirements that were adopted in 1986. At the time, a developer hoping to build a "light industrial park" on the DeKalb property got the necessary zoning — with the expressly stated condition that there be "no access from the development to Bermuda Road."

Residents of subdivisions surrounding the proposed development have spoken against it at meetings in both Gwinnett and DeKalb counties, citing traffic and safety as primary concerns. Tuesday was no different, though they honed in more specifically on the Bermuda Road entrance.

"We need you in this particular instance to look out for DeKalb County," said Lance Hammonds, who lives in the area and said he was also representing the DeKalb NAACP. "Gwinnett County in the past, they've shown that they're not a good neighbor. They don't care about the people in the area. They don't even care about the people in south Gwinnett."

DeKalb commissioners appeared to take the message to heart.

Despite claims from David, the project's attorney, that no trucks would use the DeKalb entrance and that intersection improvements would actually help ease traffic in the area, the commission voted 5-2 to

deny the proposal.

Nancy Jester and Kathie Gannon were the only commissioners to vote against the motion to deny.

No one on either side of the vote provided an in-meeting explanation of their decision, though Jester asked several questions about if the larger project would move forward with or without DeKalb's approval.

David said it likely would, but that a traffic study on the project may have to be looked at again. The Atlanta Regional Commission and the Georgia Road and Tollway Authority previously approved the development as long as about \$15 million of improvements proposed in the traffic study are completed in the surrounding area.

David said scheduled traffic improvements for the DeKalb side of Bermuda Road and nearby intersections may or may not happen without the driveway that extends into the county.

"If we're not adding to that load ... I'm not sure that that intersection would be improved," she said.

Overall, Project Rocket is proposed to include 65 loading docks, 200 truck parking spaces and 1,800 employee parking spaces.

While the project's potential tenant has not been revealed — even to many government officials — speculation has focused on e-commerce giant Amazon, which has reportedly been scoping out sites for a new Atlanta-area fulfillment center. Fulfillment centers are where customers' orders are packed and shipped.

David said during Tuesday's meeting that "the governor's office has been heavily involved" in the process.

7. Atlanta Business Chronicle

JPMorgan Chase to bolster Georgia presence with 25 new branches, 150 jobs

By Eric Mandel

Wednesday, September 26

JPMorgan Chase is planning to bolster its presence in Georgia by more than 30 percent as part of a multi-year plan for the state.

JPMorgan Chase & Co. (NYSE: JPM) said Tuesday it plans to add up to 25 new branches and 150 new jobs in Georgia in the next three years. The New York City-based multinational investment bank and financial services company entered the Georgia market 10 years ago when it bought Washington Mutual. There are currently 80 branches and 215 ATMs spread around metro Atlanta.

Chase said the firm has hired more than 30 new executives, senior bankers and wealth management advisors in Atlanta this year. That includes Atlanta-based Mark Adams, who will lead the firm's Consumer and Wealth Management businesses in Georgia and North Florida. Adams had been the Georgia market executive for Bank of America Corp.'s (NYSE: BAC) U.S. Trust business.

Chase said it led the region in deposit growth this year, with customers adding \$634 million to their banks accounts.

The bank said it has also added more than 200 employees in building its Private Bank, J.P. Morgan Securities, Commercial Banking, Investment Banking and Business Banking teams in the last 10 years.

The company, which has assets of \$2.6 trillion, said it employs about 1,000 people in Georgia across all of its lines of business.

“Georgia’s economy is thriving and its sustained corporate and population growth has led to tremendous wealth creation,” said Mike Marino, head of the J.P. Morgan Private Bank in the Southeast, in a news release. “These demographics – combined with our established client base here – make a clear case to continue to build out our team.”

8. Brunswick News

It's time for law enforcement in Georgia to get a raise

By Bill Crane

Tuesday, September 25

“Consistency is one of the great qualities of leadership which I want to share and highlight in our honoree today,” Georgia Lieutenant Governor Casey Cagle describing 2018 Sheriff of the Year, Robert N. “Butch” Reece, Sheriff of Jones County at the 6th Annual Georgia Salute to Sheriff’s in Macon.

The workday ‘clock’ never really stops for a sheriff, as the chief enforcement officer in each of Georgia’s 159 counties. Butch Reece has been serving the people of Jones County for 44 years, 38 of them as sheriff. And “Butch,” as he is known to most people in the rural bedroom community north and east of Macon, is a servant leader as well as a man of great empathy and compassion.

In Georgia, it is local law enforcement which handles nearly 95 percent of all arrests, while also serving as protectors of their communities. Sheriffs and their deputies cover the bulk of rural jurisdictions and oversee all jail operations, in partnership with well over 500 municipal and local police departments in cities, college campuses and increasingly local school systems.

Though overall crime has been on a multi-year decline in Georgia, violence against law enforcement professionals remains on the rise. So far this year five Georgia police and sheriff deputies have lost their lives during their service. Since this data has been tracked, 794 of Georgia’s finest in brown and blue have given their lives.

Ludowici chief of Police Frank McClelland Jr was run down and murdered last fall trying to clear the one intersection in his small town, alerted in advance to a high speed chase approaching his community. The chief and another innocent bystander were killed by a car and driver at an impact speed exceeding 100 miles per hour.

Nearly two years ago, a pair of Peach County deputies were gunned down during a routine call in Byron, Ga. This year, a Covington police officer was shot in the face, during the escalation of a shoplifting dispute at a local Walmart.

And though violence and injury are a realistic expectation during a law enforcement career, hundreds of vacant positions are left open and wanting in jurisdictions all across this state. Unfortunately, starting salaries in multiple smaller departments and lower population counties remain below \$30,000 per year.

Georgia has taken an active role in local education funding as far back as the 1900s, and became the primary income source for Georgia educators with the passage of the Quality Basic Education Act of 1985. However, Georgia’s police and sheriff departments remain almost entirely locally funded, with the exception of state and federal assistance grants.

P.O.S.T. certification and police academy training still does not require a college degree, and this has

allowed salaries to lag, along with the strained resources of limited property and sales tax revenue in rural jurisdictions. Georgia sheriffs, including Reece, don't want to place additional financial burden on the property owners in their communities. So it's now time for a larger and more inclusive solution.

Special purpose sales tax revenues all across Georgia fund roads, school construction, libraries, parks and other public assets. Bibb County, Georgia has more than 100 vacancies in its office of Sheriff. Metro jurisdictions across the state have 'help wanted' signs in front of their courthouses and jails. The state of Georgia thankfully increased law enforcement agency compensation by nearly 40 percent almost two years ago. This increase is justified and well-overdue, but has also resulted in a talent flood out of local law enforcement and into the ranks of the Georgia State Patrol, G.B.I. and even state park rangers. There risks are generally lower, and starting pay after training is now in the mid-40 thousands.

Butch Reece will continue to serve the good people of Jones County as long as his health and those voters choose to allow him the profession and duty which he so loves. But Sheriff Reece can't police several hundred square miles of that county, or even fully manage and operate the Jones County Jail alone.

As long as local police and sheriff deputies have had our backs, it is well past time that we took theirs. If we leave things to go along as they are, it won't be long for when you or a loved one places that 911 call and there is simply no one there to answer. This choice, like so many others is ours to make. Let's all make the right one, and soon.

9. WABE

Report: Georgia Falls Short On Housing People With Mental Illnesses

By Stephannie Stokes

Tuesday, September 25

Georgia still isn't meeting federal requirements for accommodating people with mental illnesses and developmental disabilities, according to a new report from an independent reviewer.

It's the latest development in a U.S. Department of Justice settlement agreement that stretches back to 2010.

At the time, the federal government found Georgia was illegally segregating residents with mental illnesses and developmental disabilities in psychiatric hospitals.

Since then, Georgia's health system has come a long way, the report filed on Sept. 19 recognized, but gaps remain — particularly when it comes to connecting people to supported housing.

As part of the settlement, the state must demonstrate that it can house 9,000 people with mental illnesses who might be visiting emergency rooms, leaving jails or staying at homeless shelters.

Susan Goico, who directs the Disability Integration Project at the Atlanta Legal Aid Society, said the state isn't doing enough yet to spot the individuals in those places who might be eligible for housing.

"And of course, that is key to recovery," Goico said. "You have to have a place to live in order to work toward recovery."

The report comes nearly three months after the settlement agreement's anticipated end — June 30, 2018. Georgia and the Justice Department had agreed to wait for the latest report until determining whether the state is in compliance.

Now, with the report submitted, the two parties will decide the future of the settlement agreement in court.

In a statement, the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities said it's proud of the progress the state has made in improving community- and hospital-based services.

"We are confident that we can continue to provide quality community-based services in a sustainable and systemic manner without federal oversight," the statement concluded.

10. AJC

Newborns infected with syphilis skyrocket; Georgia cases rise slightly

By Ariel Hart

Wednesday, September 26

The number of babies born with syphilis they got from their mothers has more than doubled since 2013, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported Tuesday, with some of the worst numbers coming from Southern states.

Syphilis during pregnancy is easily cured with the right antibiotics, the CDC said. So the problem speaks to deficiencies in prenatal care for women.

"Early testing and prompt treatment to cure any infections are critical first steps," said Dr. Gail Bolan, the director of the CDC's Division of STD Prevention.

"Too many women are falling through the cracks of the system," Bolan added. "To protect every baby, we have to start by protecting every mother."

Louisiana had the worst rate in the country last year of babies born with syphilis, with 59 cases altogether, making for 93.4 cases per 100,000 live births.

Georgia's rate was better than the national average, with 23 cases making for a rate of 17.7 cases per 100,000 live births. The national average was 23.3 per 100,000 live births. Georgia's rate also didn't follow the national spike, rising only slightly from 2013.

The CDC recommends all women get tested for syphilis at their first prenatal visit. But women at high risk for syphilis or who live in high-prevalence areas should be tested again early in the third trimester and at delivery, the agency said.

The disease, called congenital syphilis, can be devastating. If they live through the pregnancy, most babies who are infected before birth appear normal, according to Medline. Symptoms may include fever, rash, failure to gain weight, bone abnormalities, or irritated or cracking skin around the mouth, anus or genitals.

The consequences of not receiving treatment may include blindness, deafness, facial deformity or nervous system problems.

GA Politics

1. AJC

MARTA admits open meetings error

By David Wickert

Tuesday, September 25

MARTA has admitted it erred when its Board of Directors granted ethics waivers to two former employees without public notice this summer.

On June 22, the board voted to waive ethics rules to allow two former employees to take jobs with MARTA contractors within a year of leaving the agency. Those waivers did not appear on the board's agenda in advance, prompting a citizens group to complain to the state Attorney General's Office that MARTA had violated the Georgia Open Meetings Act. The act requires government bodies to conduct their business in public, and to provide proper notice of what issues they will discuss at meetings.

MARTA initially defended the June 22 action. It argued the ethics waivers were time-sensitive and not controversial, and it would have been "unfair and potentially harmful to those people to delay the board's approval until the next month's meeting."

But in a follow-up response to the Attorney General Monday, MARTA admitted it should have given the public notice of the actions by placing them on the board's agenda. As a "curative measure," the board plans to hold a second vote on the waivers at its Oct. 4 meeting.

The letter from MARTA attorney Paula Nash said it was not the agency's intent to circumvent open meeting requirements.

"MARTA just wanted to be fair to the two individuals waiting to start a new job," the letter said. "In the future, MARTA will ensure that such resolutions are placed on the board agenda."

MARTA has maintained that the board's decision to settle a lawsuit without public notice at the same meeting did not violate open meetings requirements.

The Attorney General's Office has not ruled on whether MARTA violated the Open Meetings Act. Last week the citizens group took its open meetings complaint a step further, filing a lawsuit in Fulton County Superior Court.

2. Georgia Health News

Will feds beat Georgia to an answer on surprise medical billing ?

By Andy Miller

Monday, September 24

The legislative effort to end surprise medical bills has repeatedly led to stalemates – and frustration – at the Georgia General Assembly.

Surprise billing occurs when consumers have procedures or visit ERs at hospitals in their insurance network, then get separate bills for hundreds or even thousands of dollars from non-network doctors who were involved in their care.

Such bills from ER doctors, anesthesiologists and radiologists, among others, often enrage consumers.

The most recent legislative attempt to fix the problem, earlier this year, got traction at the state Capitol for a while. But it sank like those in previous years when lawmakers could not reach a compromise between two differing proposals.

One of the proposals, backed by health insurers, focused on giving consumers more information on non-network providers and costs. The other, supported by physician groups, would have set a formula for insurer reimbursements to doctors for out-of-network care.

The issue is not dead under the Gold Dome. State Sen. Chuck Hufstetler, a Rome Republican who backed legislation earlier this year, said Monday that he has talked “with all sides on this issue and I believe there will be a serious attempt to solve out-of-network billing the next session.”

Meanwhile, several other states have passed legislation to address the surprise billing problem. And now, with growing national concern about the issue, the U.S. Congress has taken an interest. A bipartisan group of senators recently unveiled a plan to protect patients from surprise bills and high charges from hospitals or doctors not in their insurance networks.

The federal effort comes as polling suggests that surprise billing is a bigger worry for consumers than had been thought.

A survey by Consumer Reports in April found that 27 percent of insured Americans have received a medical bill that they did not expect or that was much higher than they expected over the past two years. Among this group, almost two-thirds had to pay \$500 or more out of pocket for the bill.

A Kaiser Family Foundation poll in August found an even higher percentage experiencing this problem. Nearly 4 in 10 said they had a surprise bill from a doctor, hospital or lab in the past year.

And the Kaiser survey found that 67 percent of people worry more about out-of-the-blue medical bills than they do about insurance deductibles, prescription drug costs, or basic living expenses such as rent, food, and gas.

The draft legislation in the U.S. Senate, which sponsors said is designed to prevent medical bankruptcies, targets three major consumer concerns, according to Kaiser Health News:

** Treatment for an emergency by a doctor who is not part of the patient’s insurance network at a hospital that is also outside that network. The patients would be required to pay out-of-pocket the amount required by their insurance plan. The hospital or doctor could not bill the patient for the remainder of the bill, a practice known as “balance billing.” The hospital and doctor could seek additional payments from the patient’s insurer under state regulations or through a formula established in the legislation.

** Treatment by an out-of-network doctor or other provider at a hospital that is in the patient’s insurance network. Patients would pay only what is required by their plans. Again, the doctors could seek more payments from the health plans based on formulas set up by state rules or through the federal formula.

** Mandated notification to emergency patients, once they are stabilized, that they could run up excess charges if they are in an out-of-network hospital.

Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.), a physician who introduced the bill on Capitol Hill, said the proposal “protects patients in those emergency situations where current law does not, so that they don’t receive a surprise bill that is basically uncapped by anything but a sense of shame.”

Beth Stephens of Georgia Watch, who has supported surprise billing legislation at the General Assembly, said that “on the positive side, this [U.S. Senate] legislation would help patients by removing them from the middle of expensive and time-consuming medical billing disputes. The bill would protect consumers against excessive cost-sharing when they encounter out-of-network providers in emergencies or in non-emergencies at in-network facilities.”

But she said her group is concerned that the federal bill could drive up insurance costs for consumers by raising the rates paid to some hospitals and facility-based providers.

“Higher provider charges translate into higher insurance premium costs, which means fewer people may be able to afford to keep their insurance coverage,” Stephens said. “Also, unlike some state bills that include an independent dispute resolution process for excessive charges, Senator Cassidy’s bill does not provide a way to challenge rates that are potentially unfair to consumers and employers.”

Kevin Lucia, a senior research professor at Georgetown University’s Center on Health Insurance Reforms, told Kaiser Health News that states regulate only some health plans and that “leaves open a vast number of people that aren’t covered by those laws.”

Cassidy’s announcement cited two recent articles from Kaiser Health News and NPR’s “Bill of the Month” series, including a \$17,850 urine test and a \$109,000 bill after a heart attack.

Lucia said both ground and air ambulances can leave patients responsible for surprisingly high costs as well.

Although Texas is one of nearly two dozen states that provide consumers with some degree of protection against surprise balance bills, those state laws don’t apply to self-funded plans.

“The real test of surprise billing legislation is whether it will provide fair, effective protections to the patients who use the health care system while also reining in practices that could make insurance less affordable to purchase,” said Georgia Watch’s Stephens, who predicts the General Assembly will again take up the issue in January.

These billing disputes rarely end up in court, according to KHN, mainly because lawyers are hesitant to take cases that don’t guarantee attorney’s fees.

Drew Altman, president and CEO of Kaiser Family Foundation, said in an Opinion column in Axios that surprise bills “have the elements of a perfect campaign issue. There is a victim: consumers. And a villain — providers — even if they argue that out-of-network providers are necessary to ensure adequate access as networks shrink to reduce costs.”

Altman added that “unlike consumers, experts do not generally put surprise bills at the top of their list of the problems in the health system. But people talk about their unexpected bills a lot, and with a sense of outrage. It’s the candidates who aren’t talking about it on the campaign trail, and that’s almost certainly a missed opportunity.”

3. AJC

Kemp proposes a \$600 million annual plan to boost teacher pay

By Greg Bluestein

Tuesday, September 25

Republican Brian Kemp proposed giving Georgia public school teachers a permanent \$5,000 annual pay raise if he’s elected governor, a plan that would cost state taxpayers roughly \$600 million a year.

The secretary of state said Tuesday that he would not raise taxes or fees to fund the pay raises, instead depending on existing revenue from the state’s \$26.2 billion budget. Kemp described it as crucial to help the state retain more educators.

“Anybody who looks at teachers’ pay will say this is much needed in Georgia,” he said. “This is about the

future of our kids. What are we spending by having teachers get in the system and then leave, not having the best and brightest in the classroom?”

Kemp unveiled the plan as polls show he’s in a tight contest with Democrat Stacey Abrams roughly six weeks before the November vote. It’s the latest example of Kemp trying to appeal to a broader set of voters after a bruising GOP primary contest where he raced to his party’s flanks on conservative issues.

The plan would put pressure on the state’s fiscal bottom line, as Georgia officials already struggle to meet the state’s education obligations. Thanks to a robust economy, this year was the first in more than a decade that state lawmakers were able to fully fund the state’s k-12 system.

During good economic times, the state typically takes in about \$900 million more in state revenue than the previous year. In the recently completed fiscal year, the state’s take rose \$961 million. That means, hypothetically, the governor and General Assembly have an extra \$900 million or so to spend each year.

However, paying for the extra students in growing k-12 schools and colleges, and increased state costs for the Medicaid program typically eat up a major chunk of that every year. And setting aside \$600 million for teacher pay raises assumes tax collections will continue to grow.

In an interview, Kemp said his plan to limit state spending and review tax credits and other programs would free up more state dollars for education spending.

“That’s why we need to look at state government now to implement a state spending cap, so in good times like we’re in, we don’t grow too fast, we budget conservatively and fund our priorities,” Kemp said.

The average Georgia public school teacher earns roughly \$54,000 a year, according to a 2017 National Education Association study, ranking the state 23rd in the nation. A recent state Department of Education report showed that roughly 44 percent of all teachers leave the profession within five years.

Abrams has said she would prioritize “competitive pay” for teachers, update the state’s decades-old funding formula and expand a community-based schooling model to offer more health care and other services. She would also eliminate the \$100 million private school tax credit that Kemp supports.

“We’re glad to see Brian Kemp has finally decided to follow Stacey Abrams’ lead on education — she released a proposal to make teacher pay competitive back in April,” Abrams spokeswoman Caitlin Highland said.

He’s far from the first candidate for governor who has promised big raises for teachers ahead of an election. When Gov. Zell Miller was running for another term in 1994, one of the pillars of his platform included 6 percent pay raises for each year of his second term. Thanks partly to a strong economy during his second term, Miller fulfilled that promise.

Kemp has often targeted Abrams as a big-spending Democrat, zeroing in on her plan to expand the Medicaid program at an estimated cost ranging from \$246 million to \$468 million a year. Asked how he reconciles his critiques of Abrams with his teacher pay plan, he pointed to the state’s expanding economy.

“We absolutely can afford this,” he said. “She’s promising the same pot of money to a lot of different people. I’m promising one pot of money to a specific thing that’s very calculated and targeted.”

Kemp was joined by several legislative leaders who also endorsed the plan, including state Senate Majority Leader Bill Cowsert, who called the pay hikes “long overdue.”

State House Speaker David Ralston, meanwhile, indicated through a spokesman that the jury was still out. He said he is looking forward to more discussion on how to “support our educators and fund important priorities like school safety.”

4. AJC

A Georgia gender gap: Kemp aims to appeal to women with new policies

By Greg Bluestein

Wednesday, September 26

A nine-figure push to increase teacher pay. An ad featuring a terrified mother worried about sex offenders near her son’s school. A constant refrain about security and crime crackdowns.

Republican Brian Kemp is racing to change his image to appeal to more moderate-leaning women — and distance himself from the hard-right persona he cultivated during the primary.

The pickup trucks and shotguns that peppered the TV ads that helped him win the GOP nomination are long gone, replaced by soft-focus images of his wife, Marty, leafing through photo albums extolling her husband’s honesty.

And these days when Kemp is asked about Donald Trump, a president who was elected with the biggest gender gap ever recorded, he’s more likely to expound on his family life and his record as secretary of state than anything that’s happening in Washington.

He’s feeling the pressure from Democrat Stacey Abrams, who is competing to be the state’s first female governor. She leads him among women by 11 percentage points, according to an Atlanta Journal-Constitution poll released this month, and her campaign believes she has room to expand that margin.

That’s one reason he’s swung his message sharply from social issues, such as guns and abortion, that dominated the primary and toward education policies that got less attention earlier this year. The \$600 million proposal he unveiled Tuesday to increase public school teachers’ pay by \$5,000 a year was his biggest effort yet to appeal to the center.

“This is affordable and prudent,” Kemp said. “It’s an investment in our educators that’s an investment in our future.”

It’s part of a two-track goal to avoid alienating conservatives who gave him a dominating win in the July runoff while also presenting a friendlier image to women in the middle of the electorate.

“Those issues that he talked about in those primary ads are still important to the Republican base. They’re not going away,” said Loretta Lepore, a veteran Republican strategist. “But he’s now talking to women who are centrists and moderates, and you do that by talking about the issues that matter to them: education, the economy and health care.”

He’s got some work to do. Take Shirley Rose-Kamick, an Acworth retiree who admits she’s no fan of either candidate — but that she “just can’t stand Kemp” because of a stance on firearms that includes a call for a sales tax holiday for guns and ammunition over the July 4 holiday.

“He’s trying to appeal to suburban women with his wife up there talking about how he’s a good father and good husband,” Rose-Kamick said. “That doesn’t make you a good candidate — there are plenty of good fathers out there that would make terrible governors.”

Two openings

Abrams is eager to press her advantage. She's focused her campaign on a mix of progressive issues and centrist policies that include a call for new gun restrictions and a vow to expand the Medicaid program under the Affordable Care Act — both issues that resonated with a majority of women in the AJC poll.

She's also picking her spots to more aggressively criticize Trump, who has largely been absent in her recent campaign messaging, perhaps out of fear of transforming the race into a referendum on the president's performance.

That's changed over the past week in the fallout over the sexual assault allegations against U.S. Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, when Trump said if the assault "was as bad as she says," then Christine Blasey Ford should have immediately filed charges.

Calling Trump's remarks appalling, Abrams joined a chorus of critics from both political parties who feared the president's words could further stigmatize victims. She was echoed by dozens of prominent Georgia Democratic women who called on Kemp to "immediately retract" his support for Kavanaugh.

The secretary of state, meanwhile, senses an opening of his own. He increasingly emphasizes a criminal justice initiative that would devote more law enforcement resources toward combating a "crisis" in gang violence.

And he's moved away from critiques of Abrams' debt to the Internal Revenue Service and toward attacks on her criminal justice policy — particularly her decision in 2017 not to vote on a measure that allowed prosecutors to charge people soliciting a victim of sex trafficking with stiffer violations.

Abrams said through a spokeswoman that she opposed that 2017 measure because it limited the discretion of judges, and she's touted other votes in support of tough new penalties on sex crimes and a Safe Harbor fund to help sex trafficking victims.

But the Georgia GOP has reinforced those barbs with an ad blanketing metro Atlanta airwaves featuring a young mother lacing into Abrams' stance on the sex offender crackdown after she drops her young son at school.

"I don't know what Stacey Abrams was thinking," she says, looking straight into the camera. "But I do know she's too extreme for Georgia."

That type of contrast appeals to Carol Johnson, a Clarkesville resident who's hungry for a laserlike focus on policy in the race's closing weeks.

"I'm not really into people's background. Everyone has backgrounds, and I'm really tired of people's sob stories," Johnson said. "We all have to make it with what we've got."

5. AJC

Why the House GOP's campaign chief isn't sweating Atlanta's hottest suburban races

By Tamar Hallerman

Tuesday, September 25

U.S. Reps. Karen Handel and Rob Woodall aren't keeping one very important Ohio Republican awake at night.

That was the message from U.S. Rep. Steve Stivers, the head of the National Republican Congressional Committee, on Tuesday as he discussed the House GOP's prospects for maintaining control of the chamber in November.

"I feel pretty confident we're going to win both those races," Stivers said of Georgia's 6th and 7th District contests in an interview in the NRCC's Capitol Hill headquarters. "So if (Democrats) want to spend money and try to beat some kind of index – if they think this is Vegas – then I welcome 'em to, but we're going to win those races."

Stivers' confidence comes as top Democrats grow increasingly optimistic about their chances of competing in the two longtime Republican strongholds, which include many of Atlanta's well-off northern suburbs.

Lucy McBath, Handel's Democratic opponent, got shoutouts from Hillary Clinton and Michael Bloomberg this week, and a gun control group tied to the billionaire announced plans to pour \$5 million into ads targeting 15 U.S. House races, including Georgia's 6th District. And in the Gwinnett and Forsyth-based 7th District, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee recently upped its support for Carolyn Bourdeaux, the political science professor seeking to deny Woodall a fifth term in Congress.

Stivers said Woodall has "done a great job reaching out into non-traditional Republican communities," a nod to Gwinnett's fast-changing demographics. And of Handel, Stivers said she is simply a "pro," pointing to her 4-point victory in last year's record-smashing special election.

Democrats are zeroing in on suburban women to help deliver them the House majority this fall, pinning their hopes on the stark gender divide surrounding Donald Trump. That strategy has put female GOP candidates on the defensive as they seek to appeal to both the president's fans and Republican women turned off by his brash style.

Handel, Stivers said, has a special pull with those voters because she herself "is the quintessential suburban woman."

"She represents her constituents very, very well," he said. "She's had some big successes in her short time in Congress, and I think the voters are going to return her to Congress."

Handel and Woodall have both focused on their own D.C. records on the campaign trail this year, emphasizing recent votes on human trafficking, opioid and tax legislation. Stivers said he expects the latter to be a "closing argument" for many Republicans this year.

"The real question is why would anybody want to change horses now when the economy is so good," he said.

In an interview earlier this month, U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Lujan, Stivers' Democratic counterpart, said his party plans to message heavily against the tax law in wealthy suburban districts like Georgia's 6th and 7th.

"I believe that you're going to see the tax debate talked about quite a bit in this district," he said of the 6th, "and it's not going to be in a way where Karen Handel is very proud of the fact that she voted to increase costs on homeowners."

6. AJC

Georgia cancels fewer voter registrations after surge last year

By Mark Niesse

Tuesday, September 25

After more than 668,000 voter registrations were canceled in Georgia in 2017, election officials are removing far fewer people from voting rolls this election year.

Republican Secretary of State Brian Kemp, who oversees elections, is no longer purging names from the state's list of 6.8 million eligible voters as he runs for governor against Democrat Stacey Abrams.

But Kemp's record of trimming inactive registered voters — more than 1 million since he took office in 2010 — is drawing criticism from his opponents who say he's limiting opportunities to vote, especially among low-income and minority Georgians who are more likely to have their registrations canceled.

Kemp counters those attacks by noting overall growth in the numbers of registered voters in Georgia. There are about 1 million more registered voters in Georgia today than there were eight years ago, outpacing the state's population growth of nearly 742,000 new residents in that period.

Under Kemp, voter registration cancellations skyrocketed, especially among those who hadn't voted in recent years or confirmed their last known address.

"It's discouraging voters rather than a celebration of democracy that we'd want to see," said Andrea Young, the executive director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia. "There should be an interest in keeping Georgia citizens in the voter pool as opposed to taking every opportunity to take people off."

Kemp's campaign responded that he has made it easier for Georgians to sign up to vote by starting online voter registration along with a smartphone app.

"As secretary of state, Brian Kemp is required by law to keep our voter rolls clean and our elections secure," campaign spokesman Ryan Mahoney said.

The numbers of voters removed from registration rolls plunged this year. After 668,691 voter registrations were canceled last year, 86,678 were canceled through Aug. 1 this year, according to the Secretary of State's Office.

That's because Georgia only conducts broad cancellations of voter registrations in non-election years as a matter of "long-standing agency practices," said Candice Broce, a spokeswoman for the Secretary of State's Office. Federal law requires states to remove ineligible people from voter rolls but doesn't allow states to systematically cancel names of ineligible voters 90 days before the date of a primary or general election for federal office.

County election offices are continuing to remove names from eligible voting lists this year, but there's no statewide effort to cancel registrations of inactive voters, she said. Voter registrations can be canceled in an election year when they become ineligible for reasons including deaths, duplicate registrations, felony convictions, voluntary requests and declarations of mental incompetence.

Georgia purged 1.5 million voters between the 2012 and 2016 elections, which is twice as many as the state canceled between 2008 and 2012, according to a report from the Brennan Center for Justice, a nonpartisan law and policy institute at New York University's School of Law.

"The numbers indicate that Georgia has been more aggressive than most other states in purging the voter rolls," said Jonathan Brater, who focuses on voting rights and elections for the Brennan Center. "Even if you think you're registered at your current address, you should always check just to be sure that nothing has happened."

The Brennan Center's report, titled "Purges: A Growing Threat to the Right to Vote," relied on numbers from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, an independent and bipartisan federal government commission. The EAC numbers are higher than those reported by the Secretary of State's Office because they include voters who moved from county to county, transferring voter registrations from one county to another, Broce said.

As in Georgia, most states conduct large-scale voter removals in non-election years, Brater said.

Georgia's voter cancellations jumped in 2017 because it was the first time the state used an automated process since upgrading its voter registration database in 2013, Broce said. The Secretary of State's Office didn't attempt to cancel inactive voters in 2015 because the new registration system's accuracy wasn't verified in time.

Canceling voter registrations is a years-long process in Georgia. First, voters can be designated as "inactive" if they make no contact with election officials for at least three years and then don't return a confirmation notice to verify their information is correct. Voters labeled as "inactive" are still registered and able to participate in elections.

After voters are declared "inactive," their registrations can be canceled if they don't participate in any elections or have contact with election officials for the next two federal general election cycles, or four years. Voters whose registrations are canceled can re-register to vote.

A dentist in Macon, Lindsay Holliday, said he was outraged when he received a letter from the Bibb County election office saying he could be moved to inactive status if he didn't respond, even though he has voted consistently for 30 years. He later found out he received the letter because the post office had mistakenly returned as undeliverable a postcard notifying him that the name of his precinct had changed.

"It doesn't take much to keep people from voting, and this process is several hurdles," said Holliday, who opposes Kemp and usually votes for Democrats. "Voters are going to get intimidated. It will inhibit minorities and disadvantaged people who are less powerful in our society."

7. AJC

Eagle's Landing cityhood could doom Stockbridge, lawyers tell court

By Leon Stafford

Monday, September 24

Creating a city of Eagle's Landing could potentially spell doom for the future of Stockbridge and could harm cities and municipalities across Georgia, lawyers for the Henry County community and one of the nation's largest municipal bond holders argued in federal court Monday.

Stockbridge, a city of nearly 29,000 residents, would lose as much as 48 percent of its property tax base and 54 percent of its commercial businesses if voters approve Eagle's Landing cityhood in a Nov. 6 referendum. The new city would be formed by de-annexing about half of Stockbridge and combining that territory with parts of unincorporated Henry County to form Eagle's Landing.

That could force the city of Stockbridge to drastically double millage rates on remaining residents to pay its bills, making mortgages too expensive and the cost of operating a business in the south metro community too high, the lawyers argued. The federal court hearing was the latest confrontation in a battle that has exposed fault lines of race, economic division and changing demographics within the community in north Henry County.

"The harm is the city of Stockbridge on Nov. 6 will very likely start this economic spiral," said Balch and Bingham attorney Chris Anulewicz.

Stockbridge and Capital One Public Financing — which holds about \$11.75 million of Stockbridge bond debt — are suing the Henry County office of elections and registration to stop the referendum, calling it unconstitutional because it does not proportion the debt Stockbridge owes to the new city of Eagle's Landing.

The outcome of the case is being widely watched because of the impact it could have on other communities that might want to secede from their home cities, such as Buckhead separating from Atlanta.

It also could have implications for how much cities across the state pay for municipal bonds in the future.

The big bonding companies and bond experts have warned that Georgia could pay more for borrowing money because lenders would price the potential for secession into loans.

Coleman Talley attorney Thompson Kurrie, who represents Eagle's Landing cityhood supporters, said Stockbridge has as much as \$34 million in funds at its disposal and another \$4.5 million in assets that it could sell to raise more revenue, more than enough to cover its obligations.

He added that Stockbridge leaders also consistently leave out that the referendum would also allow some residents in unincorporated Henry County to become part of Stockbridge, adding hundreds of new residents.

"That's not been touched (on) here," he said.

District Court Judge Leigh Martin May declined to rule on the motion Monday, saying she wanted to read over the arguments and see if she had follow up questions. But she promised to expedite her decision, though she did not say when she would rule.

She expressed skepticism about arguments put forward by both sides at the hearing that ran for 3 and 1/2 hours. She pressed Stockbridge and Capital One lawyers to say why they couldn't just put the burden on the residents who would be left behind and asked Kurrie why the new Eagle's Landing residents should be free of the obligations they made as Stockbridge residents.

"There are other ways that your client can be made whole other than stopping the election," May said to Capital One attorney David Balzer of King & Spalding.

Balzer responded that the problem is "this is legislation that move half of our collateral out in a way that we can't access it."

Judge May acknowledged the unusual nature of the referendum and the lack of similar cases or precedent. The Eagle's Landing cityhood effort is the first in the state where a city would be formed by taking territory from an existing town.

"I do want to make sure I get it right," she said.

8. AJC

Kemp faces pressure to retract 'misguided' support for Kavanaugh

By Greg Bluestein
Tuesday, September 25

A group of dozens of prominent Democratic Georgia women urged Republican Brian Kemp to “immediately retract” his support for Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh as he faces a swirl of sexual misconduct allegations.

While Kemp would have no say over Kavanaugh’s appointment if elected governor, he wrote a letter praising the Donald Trump nominee as a jurist with a “clear understanding of the proper role of a judge.”

After Christine Blasey Ford accused Kavanaugh of sexually assaulting her when both were in high school, several Republican U.S. senators have called for more time to vet the accusation. A second woman has since told The New Yorker that Kavanaugh exposed himself to her when they were students at Yale.

The letter claimed Kemp’s “unwavering support for Judge Kavanaugh’s character was misguided given the credible information brought forth by multiple women and the need for every woman to be heard.”

Its signatories include state legislators, educators, party leaders and activists.

Kemp said through a spokesman that he agreed with U.S. Sens. Johnny Isakson and David Perdue that “we need to hear from Dr. Ford and Judge Kavanaugh in a timely manner.”

Ford is set to testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee on Thursday. Kavanaugh repeatedly denied the allegations of sexual misconduct in a Monday interview on Fox News.

Kemp’s opponent, Stacey Abrams, has joined the chorus of Democrats who criticized Trump for challenging Ford’s account. She said she was appalled by the president’s tweet that asserted Ford should have filed charges if the attack “was as bad as she says.”

9. Associated Press
Georgia Democratic House candidate slams GOP opponent on Kavanaugh
By Errin Haines
Tuesday, September 25

Democratic House candidate Lucy McBath of Georgia is calling for a full investigation into the sexual misconduct allegations against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh and slamming her opponent, Republican Rep. Karen Handel, who initially praised him.

The race is among the more closely watched ahead of the November midterms.

McBath tells The Associated Press, “The accusations against Brett Kavanaugh must be thoroughly investigated.” She says Handel “has stood by Brett Kavanaugh and refused to speak out on any of these accusations.”

In July, Handel referred to Kavanaugh in tweets as “inspiring” and “outstanding.”

Handel’s office did not immediately respond to a request for comment Monday.

10. Insider Advantage
Senate Committee to look at certification process of Service Animals in Georgia

By Cindy Morley
Wednesday, September 26

During the last session of the Georgia General Assembly, a number of study committees were established — committees designed to look at issues like school safety, healthcare in rural Georgia, and the extended use of cannabis oil.

While many of these meetings have received a lot of attention, one has not. A special Senate Study Committee will meet for the first time today to look at the certification process for service animals in Georgia.

Sen. Renee Unterman (R-Buford) will chair the Senate Study Committee on Service Animals for Physically or Mentally Impaired Persons. The meeting will be held at 10 a.m. in Room 450 of the Georgia Capitol.

The Senate Study Committee on Service Animals for Physically or Mentally Impaired Persons was created through Senate Resolution 467 during the 2018 Legislative Session.

The committee is composed of five members of the Senate and will examine current laws relating to the certification process for service animals.

According to information released by Sen. Unterman's office, members of the committee will review current procedures and determine if there is a need for "a uniform certification process or the issuance of information cards."

Additionally, the committee will discuss the issue of "fake service animals" and examine if this should be a criminal act. The resolution states that "some individuals take their pets with them to public accommodations and facilities claiming such pet is a service animal when, in actuality, such pet is a 'fake service animal.'"

The legislation points out that there is no state or federal certification process to ensure that an animal accompanying a person is "actually a service animal."

As set by Senate Resolution 467, the committee must report its findings on or before December 1, 2018.

11. Health Affairs

How Georgia's Next Governor Can Make Quick Progress In Improving Health: Part 1

By Harris Allen
Wednesday, September 26

Based on factors such as fiscal soundness, growth in investment capital and infrastructure, and workforce capabilities, recent surveys have ranked Georgia as a top state for business. Conspicuously absent from these survey criteria has been the state's relatively poor standing in terms of health, a key driver of productivity, which has been linked to business financial performance.

As becomes evident when compared with Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, all 50 US states are being buffeted by the nation's health outcome/cost dilemma. In 2014 (the latest year for which all of the following have been reported in a way that permits comparison), life expectancy at birth for those born in Hawaii (first-ranked among the states) ranked below life expectancy at birth for those born in Finland (ranked twenty-first among OECD countries). Yet, per capita health expenditure for bottom-ranked Utah was still higher than fifth-ranked Netherlands.

Georgia, however, stands out with respect to the discrepancy posed by the promise of its business-friendly designation on one hand and its health rating on the other. New action to improve health and reduce health costs thus represents not only a moral imperative but also an enormous economic development opportunity for its next governor. Breakthroughs in the near term in this regard will be a key to establishing momentum.

In Part 1 of this two-part post, I suggest four policy recommendations for pursuing this objective. In Part 2 to follow, I offer a crucial, fifth and final recommendation that amounts to a call for the state's next governor truly to "own" the improvement of health in Georgia, and I suggest several steps toward this end.

The collective implementation of these recommendations will forge a new direction for health reform. I close by discussing why the time is right for this direction and consider whether it will work in other states, especially those that may see new political leadership in 2019.

The Opportunity

Georgia's per capita health spending ranks forty-eighth when compared with other US states, and the effects on health have been commensurate. In the most recent iteration of America's Health Rankings (AHR), which compares states on health outcomes such as premature deaths, preventable hospitalizations, and children in poverty, Georgia ranked in the lowest quintile (forty-first). Particularly distressing are documented health disparities. Differences of up to 13 years in length of life expectancy at birth have been reported across ZIP codes in Atlanta.

Achieving real improvement on these metrics will require extensive effort. Even in employer settings, which tend to be relatively contained when compared to settings that are communitywide, well-done case studies report that as many as five years may be needed to realize material gains in population health while bending the cost curve.

The recommendations that follow collectively span access, quality of care and outcomes, prevention, and cost dimensions as well as stakeholder performance, accountability, and transparency. While the political lay of the land may dictate sequence, the next governor should endeavor to make major strides on each dimension in the first six months in office. The more progress made by "quick-hit" successes across the board, the greater the capacity to manage concerns about budget-busting scenarios that will likely arise, notwithstanding Georgia's relatively favorable per capita health spending ranking.

Likewise, the more definitive the example Georgia will set for other states that seek a new breakthrough on their own health outcomes and cost dilemma.

Recommendations

Pursue Medicaid Expansion Untethered To Work Requirements

Georgia is one of 14 states that has yet to either expand Medicaid per Affordable Care Act guidelines or at least consider it (as of July 3, 2018, 33 states have expanded Medicaid and three are considering it). It has forgone an estimated \$12.5 billion in federal funds in the process. This may also be having an impact on the health of many Georgians. Four of the top five AHR states, it can be noted, have expanded Medicaid and the fifth is considering it. Four of the five bottom-ranked states, on the other hand, have not expanded. Opposition has been fueled by the claim that such expansion will fail in its objectives and lead to eventual uncontrollable state cost obligations. However, the lure of the federal dollars remains. To ease access in a way that may be more palatable politically, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid

(CMS) has said it is willing to support work requirement waivers. Although now under lawmaker consideration, Georgia has yet to apply for one.

Medicaid exists by statutory authority to serve the health and wellness needs of the nation's vulnerable and low-income population. At a projected increase in the state budget of \$243 million, which would be largely offset by savings in other areas such as uncompensated care, full Medicaid expansion would result in 473,000 newly insured Georgians. It is the single biggest step the state can take to improve access. Moreover, a recent review has linked Medicaid expansion to increases in coverage, service use, quality of care, and spending (almost all covered by the federal component) with virtually no indication of negative consequences (for example, increased waiting times).

This evidence, it can be noted, accumulated prior to the current debate over work requirements, the latest development of which has been the recent denial of Kentucky's application for a waiver. Absent new evidence clarifying the impact of work requirements on loss of Medicaid coverage and whether such requirements will improve enrollee health (the main rationale cited for this denial), the next governor should consider rapidly pursuing expansion and decoupling it with a work requirement waiver.

Press For Increased Provider Participation In Medicaid

Surveys by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) National Center for Health Statistics have been used to estimate physician acceptance of new patients by payment type. In 2013, while 85 percent and 84 percent of office-based physicians nationally accepted new patients with private insurance and Medicare, respectively, only 69 percent accepted new patients with Medicaid. In Georgia, 72 percent of office-based physicians accepted Medicaid, 3 percent above the national average. In 2015, while the percentage of physicians accepting Medicaid at the national level stayed at comparable levels, Georgia dropped 15 points to 57 percent, 12 percent below the national average and the fourth-lowest state percentage.

While caution should be exercised in placing too much stock in the pinpoint accuracy of these estimates, they paint a landscape wherein Georgia's numbers are cause for concern. The primary intent of Medicaid expansion—to widen access to timely and appropriate ambulatory care to help patients prevent illness, control acute episodes, and manage chronic conditions—will not be met if the supply of physicians to meet the increase in demand that will result is inadequate. Other research has linked physician reluctance to low reimbursement rates, delayed payment and billing requirements, and greater clinical burden due to greater health needs and difficulties accessing specialty care.

Earlier this summer, CMS came forward with a new proposed rule for calendar year 2019 that focuses on the Medicare physician fee schedule and quality payment program. While this rule is not directed at Medicaid per se, the impact of innovations that CMS implements for Medicare often extends into other payer environments such as Medicaid. This rule could thus serve to ameliorate these sources of physician reluctance. For example, it includes provisions for reducing physician paperwork burden such as eliminating the requirement to justify the medical necessity of a home visit in lieu of an office visit. It also seeks to modernize payment policies to promote access to virtual care, such as providing reimbursement for virtual check-ins and evaluation of patient-submitted photos or recorded video and Medicare-covered telehealth services for prolonged preventative care.

This proposed rule, whose comment period ended on September 10, is well on its way to being put into effect. The next administration should undertake a systematic review of the applicability of its proposed changes to Georgia's Medicaid environment and move to advance its implementation where feasible in the near term. It should also endeavor to obtain CMS support for this purpose.

Pursue A New Public-Private/Nonprofit Partnership For Cultivating Healthier Lifestyles

A range of behaviors is impairing health and well-being across the population spectrum in Georgia; for example, physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use. No demographic, socioeconomic status, racial, or clinical group is being spared.

These circumstances have helped fuel various initiatives that have as a key objective the cultivation of healthier lifestyles. Key Georgia stakeholders are pursuing this objective in largely their own spheres.

Delta Airline's nationally recognized approach for promoting a culture of wellness, the 2016–19 Strategic Plan adopted by the Fulton County Board of Commissioners, and the seven social determinant of health strategies comprising the operating model for the Atlanta Regional Collaborative for Health Improvement (ARCHI), are examples. Collaboration across stakeholders is also emerging. Sharecare and the Atlanta Hawks are co-promoting access to a comprehensive digital platform. Their vision is to enable individuals across Atlanta and Georgia to take control of and manage their health in one place.

In 2016, the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) began a new campaign that has much potential for bringing new cohesion and enhanced effectiveness to these disparate efforts, expanding their collective reach to the state level. This campaign is seeking to promote a healthier workforce, improve public health programs, and support chronic condition self-management. Among its achievements to date is the DPH Work Healthy Georgia Toolkit, a playbook that distills key lessons that employers have learned in their work to improve employee health and productivity.

This campaign and its work to build on the employer experience offers an excellent launching pad for a new concerted effort to improve health behaviors across the state. Using tools such as incentives, competitions, and highly visible leadership commitments, leading employers have made major inroads in reducing employee risk behaviors. They are also making material advances that are improving cultures of health to facilitate the adoption and maintenance of behavior change.

In this context, a new public-private/nonprofit partnership focused on the prevalence of modifiable risk behaviors across the full spectrum of lifestyle risks to physical, mental, and social health could well be the missing key to significant improvement at the state level. Physical inactivity is a logical first choice in this regard. The high prevalence of this behavior, its adverse effects, and the return on investment when well-managed interventions are mounted, have all been well documented.

As envisioned, this public-private/nonprofit partnership will feature the next governor's office taking a proactive role to helping to lead its development, with key parties in each of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors involved:

High priority will be given to support the efforts of the DPH (the public member) to accelerate use of its playbook in workplaces statewide and to put metrics in place for refining its approach.

These DPH efforts will be supported by the training and expertise of a private-sector firm that has developed a national practice for advancing workplace cultures of health such as HealthNEXT.

Also tapped will be the nonprofit Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO). HERO's Healthy Workplaces, Healthy Communities initiative is cultivating a national network and best-practice laboratory that can guide efforts to broaden beyond the employer base into the community.

Arrangements among these organizations will need to be made and monitored. Other stakeholder groups in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors, including Delta, Fulton County, and ARCHI, can no doubt bring more locally oriented insights, expertise, and assets to the table. Exerting the convening power of the governor's office to help drive this public-private/nonprofit partnership merits consideration.

Push The CDC To Help Address Health Trends In Its Own Backyard—Especially On Diabetes And The Opioid Crisis

The CDC has developed population-oriented resources and expertise for combating diagnosed and pre-diagnosed conditions that are second to none. While its recent success in tackling the Zika outbreak in Africa received much international acclaim, it also has in-house much capacity for tackling health conditions that have become major public health concerns here in Georgia.

Yet, it is not uncommon to hear questions raised about the extent to which the CDC has been proactive in supporting the implementation of its recommendations in its own backyard so to speak (Georgia, where it is headquartered). Public commentary from senior CDC and CDC Foundation officials at recent conferences has acknowledged this perception and suggested a strong interest in enlarging and broadening the organization's local footprint to counteract it.

This is an opening that the next governor should press for full advantage. While a wide array of public health and chronic conditions could benefit from such an enlarged footprint, at the top of many observers' list of state priorities are the prevention, treatment, and management of diabetes, especially among juveniles, and opioid abuse, especially among the elderly. Early in the next administration, overtures should be made to the CDC and the CDC Foundation to explore how the full weight of the governor's office can be brought to bear to forge new collaboration and to support existing projects.

Initiatives prioritizing diabetes and opioid abuse should be undertaken with an eye toward setting into place statewide infrastructure that can be expanded to other health issues as time and resources permit.

12. AJC

'Dancing Preacher' drops challenge of loss to Georgia Senate leader

By Maya T. Prabhu

Tuesday, September 25

A failed Georgia Senate candidate dropped her court challenge of the results from May's primary election, which she narrowly lost to the chamber's Democratic leader.

During a hearing at Fulton County Superior Court on Tuesday, lawyers for Sabrina McKenzie asked the judge to dismiss the case.

McKenzie, an ordained minister from Stone Mountain who teaches liturgical dance and calls herself the "dancing preacher," filed a lawsuit over the summer requesting a new election. She claimed that people were allowed to vote after state law requires polls to close, that some voters got the wrong ballots and that the provisional ballot tally was questionable.

She was challenging the results of her contest with Senate Minority Leader Steve Henson, D-Stone Mountain, which she lost by 111 votes, according to official results from the Secretary of State's Office. A recount requested by McKenzie in June upheld the May result.

Shortly before the hearing was scheduled to begin, McKenzie informed her lawyers she wanted to dismiss the case.

McKenzie was suing the DeKalb County Board of Voter Registration and Elections and its director, Erica Hamilton, as well as Henson and Secretary of State Brian Kemp, who is in charge of overseeing the state's elections. All had asked that the case be dismissed.

Henson said he was glad the case wasn't moving forward.

"I knew it would be dismissed," he said. "It had no merit whatsoever."

Henson has served in the Senate for 24 years, first spending eight years in the chamber before leaving in 1998 to run unsuccessfully for labor commissioner. He returned in 2002 and has been the Senate's Democratic leader since 2011.

This year was the first time Henson had been challenged in an election since returning to the Senate in 2002.

Henson will win the general election and return to the Senate next year since no Republican is running in the contest.